

THE
HISTORY
OF
ORACLES.
IN TWO
DISSERTATIONS;

Wherein are proved,

- I. That the ORACLES were not given out by *Dæmons*; but were invented and supported by the *Craft* of the *Pagan* Priests.
- II. That the ORACLES did not cease at the Coming of JESUS CHRIST; but subsisted Four Hundred Years after it, till the entire Abolition of *Paganism*.

By M. de FONTENELLE,

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Translated from the best Edition of the
Original *French*.

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MDCCL.

P R E F A C E

O R I G I N A L S

NEW TRANSLATION.



P R E F A C E

T O T H I S

New TRANSLATION.

THE Subject of this celebrated Treatise, which for many Ages past exercised the Pens of the most learned and ingenious Authors, is now revived by Dr. Middleton's Examination of the Discourses on Prophecy, wrote by a Right Reverend Prelate of distinguished Abilities.

The Quotations which the Dr. has made from this excellent Treatise (as he very justly styles it) are some of the strongest Arguments he makes use of for his Opinion; and the great Character he gives both of M. de Fontenelle and this Work, induced me to present the Public with this new Translation.

The former Edition of it in English was apparently done by a Person who, however skilled in the French Language,

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was intirely unacquainted with the Idiom of ours; as is evident not only from the Gallicisms in almost every Period, but from his mistaking the Sense of his Author in some Places, and rendering it in others quite ambiguous. Besides, as it was done from the first and most imperfect Edition of the Original, the Author's Sentiments were not so clearly, nor so justly expressed, as they are now.

In this, which is a Translation from the most improved Edition of the Original, I have taken the utmost Care to do Justice to my Author, and as M. de Fontenelle is a most entertaining Writer, I persuade myself the Reader will not find him less so in a True English Dress; which will be greatly to the Satisfaction of his

Very humble Servant,

March 2,

1750.

S. WHATLEY.

THE
Author's PREFACE
TO HIS
READERS.

NOT long since, there fell in-
to my Hands a *Latin* Tre-
tise concerning the *Heathen*
Oracles, lately written by M. Van-
Dale, M. D. and printed in *Holland*;
in which I found that Author has
strenuously confuted the common
Opinion, that the *antient* *Oracles*
were delivered by Demons, and that
they ceased intirely at the Coming of
Jesus Christ. The whole Work ap-
peared to me to be full of deep
Knowledge in Antiquity, and exten-
sive Learning; and I once had a
Thought of translating it, that the

Ladies, and those Gentlemen who do not care to read *Latin*, might also be led into the Perusal of a Tract so agreeable and useful. But I reflected, that a Translation of this Book would not answer the End I proposed. Dr. *Van-Dale* wrote only for the Learned, and was in the right to neglect those Ornaments, which they would not have esteemed. He gives a great Number of Passages, which he quotes very faithfully, and his Versions are wonderful exact, when he translates from the *Greek*: He enters also into a

Discussion of many Points of Criti-

cism, which, though they are not always necessary, yet are always curious. This was his only Way to satisfy the Learned, who would not have thanked him much for Reflections either *moral* or *jocose*.

Besides, Dr. *Van-Dale* makes no Scruple very often to break off the Thread of his Discourse, for the
fake

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sake of introducing other Things, which present themselves; and incloses one Parenthesis in another, and perhaps a third: And herein he does not amiss, since they, for whom he proposed to write, are used to the Fatigue of Reading, and a learned Perplexity does not embarrass them. But they, for whom I should have made my Translation, would not have liked it, if I had taken this Method: The Ladies, and, to be plain, most of the Gentlemen, of this Country, are as much affected with the Graces and Turns of Expression and Thought, as with the solid Beauty of the most exact Researches, and profoundest Discussions; and, being very indolent, they prefer Books written in a regular Method, that they may be the less obliged to Attention. For this Reason, I laid aside the Thoughts of Translating, and judged it would be better, preserving the Basis and Substance of the

the Work, to give it quite another Form. I confess, that no Man could extend this Liberty farther than I have done; for I have changed the whole Disposition of the Book; I have retrenched whatever appeared to me either of too little Importance in itself, or not entertaining enough to make Amends for that Defect. I have not only added all the Ornaments I could think of, but many Things, which prove or clear up the Matter in question. I argue sometimes upon the same Facts, and the same Passages, which Dr. *Van-Dale* furnished me withal, in a different Manner from him; and I have not been scrupulous to insert many Arguments wholly my own. In fine, I have new-cast the whole Work, and have put it into the same Order as I would have done at first, to have answered my particular View, had I the Ability of Dr. *Van-Dale*; but, since I come far short
of

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of it, I have borrowed his Learning, and ventured to make use of my own Judgment, such as it is; tho' I should infallibly have pursued his Method, had I the same Persons to deal with as he had. If this comes to his Knowledge, I beseech him to pardon the Liberty I have taken, since it will serve to shew the Excellence of his Book: For certainly his Part in it will still appear perfectly good, though it has passed thro' my Hands.

I have lately learned two Things which have Relation to this Book. The first from the * *Novvelles, Sec. of, News from the Republic of Letters*, which is, that M. *Mabius*, Senior Professor of Divinity at *Laple*, has undertaken to confute Dr. *Van Dale*. He allows indeed, that *Oracles* did not cease at the Coming of *Jesur Christ*, which will be find-

* For the Month of *June* 1686.

sputable

Author's Preface.

spatable when we shall have examined that Question; but he will by no means yield, that the *Demons* were not the Authors of the *Oracles*. Now, his allowing the Continuance of the *Oracles* beyond the Time of the Coming of *Christ*, is a very considerable Attack of the common Hypothesis, and it is a great Argument that they were not delivered by *Demons*, if the Son of God did not silence them. It is certain, that, according to the Connection commonly supposed between these two Things, what destroys the one, gives a very great Shock to the other, or rather quite ruins it: And this, perhaps, after the reading of this Book, will appear still more rational.

But what is more remarkable is, that it appears by the Extract from the *Republic of Letters*, that one of *M. Maëbius's* strongest Reasons against *Dr. Van-Dale* was, that God forbade the *Israelites* to consult Sooth-sayers,

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sayers and the Spirits of *Pythia*, whence he concludes, that *Pythia*, that is to say, the *Dæmons*, gave out the *Oracles*, and probably the Story of the Ghost of *Samuel* follows next. Dr. *Van-Dale* may answer what he pleases; but, for my part, I declare, that, under the Name of *Oracle*, I do not include *Magic*: in which it is not to be disputed but *Dæmons* are concerned; nor is *Magic* at all included in what we commonly understand by the Word [*Oracle*], not even according to the Sense of the ancient *Heathens*, who, on the one hand, regarded *Oracles* with Respect as a Part of their Religion, and, on the other, had as great an Abhorrence for *Magic*, as we have. To go and consult a *Necromancer*, or some *Sorcerer* of *Thessaly*, like *Erastus* in *Lucan*, was not called going to an *Oracle*; and this Distinction must be observed also, that, admitting the common
Opi-

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Opinion, which affirms that *Oracles* ceased at the Coming of *Christ*, yet no Man can pretend that Magic then ceased; so that the Objection of *M. Maëbius* makes nothing against me, if he leaves the Word [*Oracle*] in its ordinary and natural Signification, as well antient as modern.

The second Thing I have to speak of is, that I am informed, that the Reverend Father *Thomassin*, a Priest of the Oratory, famous for so many excellent Books, wherein he has reconciled solid Piety to profound Learning, has robbed this Book of the Honour of first broaching this Paradox, by treating *Oracles* as mere Imposture, in his Book called *The Method of studying and of teaching the Poets* more Christiano. I confess, I was a little troubled at this; but I was pacified by reading the twenty-first Chapter of his second Book, where I found nothing coinciding with my Opinion, save only

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only a few Words in the nineteenth Article, as follows: *The true Cause of Silence being imposed on the Oracles was, that, by the Incarnation of the divine Logos, Truth shone out in the World, and diffused Abundance of Light in it far different from what was before; so that Men saw into the Delusions of Augurs and Astrologers, the Inspectors of the Entrails of Beasts, and that these, with the Oracles in general, were mere Impostures, whereby Men deceived one another with obscure Words, and double Entendres. In fine, if there had been Oracles, in which the Demons gave Answers, the Coming of the Incarnate Truth had condemned the Empire of Lyes to an eternal Silence.* It is, however, very certain, that the Demons were consulted, whenever Men had Recourse to Incantments and Magic, as Lucan reports of Pompey the younger, and as the Scripture assures us concerning Saul. I agree, that

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that in a large Treatise, which only mentions *Oracles* occasionally, briefly, and without any Design of searching into the Depth of the Matter, it is indeed saying enough of them, to attribute most of the *Oracles* to the Imposture of Men; to make a Question, whether there were any at all, in which *Demons* were concerned; to allow the *Demons* no further Exercise than what comes within the Compass of Incantations and Magic; and, in fine, to say, that *Oracles* ceased, not purely because the Son of God imposed Silence on them all at once, but because Minds that were most enlightened by the Publication of the Gospel, were undeceived. This supposes there was still some human Imposture, that could not be detected so soon. However, in my Opinion, a Question decided in so few Words, may be treated of anew, and as fully as the Nature of it will admit, without any Man's being

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being justly offended by the Representation; for it is representing at large what the World has hitherto seen only in Miniature, and so small, that its Objects were scarce perceptible.

I hope I may be allowed, ere I conclude my Preface, to make a short Observation upon the Style I have used, which is that of familiar Conversation. I imagined myself holding a Discourse with my Reader, and was the more easily induced to this Way of Writing, because I was under a sort of Necessity of disputing with him. And the Materials which I had in hand being generally very susceptible of Ridicule, engaged me in a Manner of Writing far different from the Sublime; for I am of Opinion, that none ought to write in the Sublime, but he who writes in his own Defence, it is a Style so affected. I confess, that the low Style is yet something worse; but there is a Medium of a
very

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very great Latitude. The main Difficulty is to chuse that, which is nicely adapted to the Subject, and not to depart from it.

I hope I may be allowed, ere I conclude my Preface, to make a short Observation upon the Style I have used, which is that of familiar Conversation, and may be said to hold a middle way between the Read-er, and the Author, by inducing to this Way of Writing, because I was under a sort of Necessity of dis-puting with him: And the Mat-ter which I had in hand being ge-nerally very susceptible of Ridicule, engaged me in a Manner of Writing far different from the sublime; for I am of Opinion, that none ought to write in the sublime, but he who writes in his own Defence, in a style so affected. I confess that the low style is yet something worse; but there is a Medium of a

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THE



T H E
H I S T O R Y
O F
O R A C L E S.

MY Design is not to give you directly a History of *Oracles*; I only intend to combat that common Opinion which attributes them to *Demons*, and will have them to cease at the coming of *Jesus Christ*. But in doing this it is necessary that I run thro' the whole History of *Oracles*; that I give an Account of their Original, their Progress, the different Manners in which they were delivered; and lastly, of their Decay, with the same Exactness as if I were in these Matters pursuing

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ing the natural Order and Method of History.

It is not at all surprising, that Philosophers should be so much puzzled in finding out the Operations of Nature: It's Principles are so hidden that 'tis Rashness in Human Reason to think to discover them. But when the only Inquiry is whether the *Oracles* were a Trick and Artifice of the Heathen Priests, or not, Where lies the Difficulty? Cannot we fallible Mortals imagine how far others may have been Deceivers or Dupes? But especially when the single Question is at what Time *Oracles* ceased, what should occasion the least Doubt? There are many Books that treat of *Oracles*; let us see therefore at what Time, or in what Age the last *Oracles*, of which we have any Knowledge, were delivered.

Men are not willing to suffer the Decision of things to be too easy; they mingle their own Prejudices in the Discussion, and so create much greater Perplexities than are naturally in the Things themselves; and those Scruples, which only ourselves frame, give us the most Pain to solve.

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The History of Oracles. 3

In my Opinion this Article of *Oracles* hath no considerable Difficulty in it, but what we ourselves have raised. It was in it's own Nature a Point of Religion amongst the *Pagans*; is become so without any Necessity amongst Christians, and on both sides it is loaded with Prejudices which have obscured the clearest Truths.

I confess that Prejudices are not in themselves common to the true as well as false Religions; for they reign chiefly in the false, which are only the Contrivance of *human Understanding*; but in the true (which is the Work of God alone) there would none be ever found, if such *human Understanding* could be prevented from intermeddling, and mixing something of its own with it; for what are all its new Inventions but groundless Prejudices, since it is not able to add any thing real or solid to the Work of God.

Mean time these Prejudices that are got into the true Religion are, as I may say, so closely interwoven with it, that they have attracted a Respect to themselves, which is only due to the

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true Religion; and we dare not censure the One for fear of attacking at the same time something that is sacred in the Other. I do not reproach this Excess of Religion in those that are capable of it, but rather commend them; yet whatever Praise they may deserve for it, 'tis undeniable that a just *Medium* is much better; and that it is more reasonable to separate Error from Truth, than to reverence Error that is mix'd with Truth. Christianity never wanted the Support of false Proofs; and less now than ever, from the Pains the great Men of this Age have taken to establish it on its true Foundations with greater Power than ever the Ancients did; and we ought to be filled with so just a confidence of our Religion, as to reject the false Advantages, which could not be neglected by any other Sect.

Having laid this Foundation I advance to prove that *Oracles*, were they of what nature soever, were not delivered by *Demons*, and that they did not cease at the coming of *Jesus Christ*. Each of these Points well deserves a particular Dissertation.

A

DISSERTATION

*That Oracles were not given out
by Dæmons.*

IT is certain that there are *Dæmons*, and evil *Genii*, condemned to eternal Torment. Religion teaches us this ; and then Reason tells us that these *Dæmons* might have animated Statues, and delivered *Oracles*, if God had permitted them so to do. We are therefore only to enquire whether they had such Divine Permission or no.

'Tis only then a Matter of fact which is in Dispute ; and this Matter of fact depending wholly on the Will of God, it was of such a Nature that it ought to have been revealed to us, if the Knowledge thereof had been necessary for us.

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But the Holy Scriptures do not teach us any where that *Oracles* were delivered by *Demons*; and therefore we are at liberty to choose either side of the Question; for it is of the Number of those Things that the Divine Wisdom has thought so indifferent as to leave to our own Decision.

Nevertheless it is agreed on by all Parties, that there was something supernatural in *Oracles*; whence comes this Concurrence? the Reason of it is easily found, as to what regards the present Age: For since it was believed in the first Ages of Christianity that *Oracles* were delivered by *Demons*, this seems a sufficient Cause for us to believe it now; for whatever has been delivered by the Ancients, good or bad, is like to be favourably rehearsed; and what they themselves could not prove by sufficient Reasons, is in our Days proved by their Authority alone. If they foresaw this, they did very well not to give themselves always the Trouble of reasoning too nicely. But let us inquire into the Reasons why the Primitive Christians believed that *Oracles* had

The History of Oracles. 7

had something supernatural in them, and we will afterwards examine their Solidity.

C H A P. I.

The first Reason why the Primitive Christians believed that Oracles were delivered by Demons. The surprising Stories that were publish'd concerning Oracles, and the Genii.

Antiquity abounds with surprising Stories of Oracles, which, it was believed, could only be attributed to the Genii: I will relate but a few Examples, as a Specimen of what the rest were.

All the World knows what happened to the Pilot *Thamus*: His Ship being one Evening near certain Islands in the *Egean* Sea, the Winds were hushed on a sudden: All the Ship's

Crew were awake, and the greatest Part of them carousing, when on a sudden a Voice was heard from the Islands, calling for *Thamus*. *Thamus* suffered himself to be called twice before he spoke, but to the third Call he returned an Answer; and then the Voice commanded him, that when he arrived at a certain Place, he should cry out *That the great Pan was dead*. There was not a Man in the Ship who was not seized with Fear and Dread, and they consulted whether *Thamus* ought to obey the Voice or not; but *Thamus* resolved that if when they were arrived at the appointed Place, there were Wind enough to sail onwards, he would pass by without saying any thing; but if the Vessel was becalmed, he then would acquit himself of the Order he had received. But being surprised with a Calm in that very Place, he cried out with all his Force, *That the Great Pan was dead*. Scarce had he given over speaking, but they heard from every side Groans and Complaints as of a great Multitude surprised and afflicted at this News. All those

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those who were in the Ship were Witnesses of this odd Affair; the Fame of which spread it self in a little Time, as far as *Rome*; and the Emperor *Tiberius* having a Desire to see *Thamus* himself, assembled a great Number of such as were learned in the *Pagan* Theology to know of them who this great *Pan* was, and it was concluded that he was the Son of *Mercury* and *Penelope*. Thus in *Plutarch's* Dialogues (where he treats of the Cessation of Oracles) *Cleombrotus* tells this Story, and says he had it of *Episberfs* his Grammar Master, who was in the Ship with *Thamus* when this Thing happened.

* *Tbulis* was a King of *Egypt*, whose Empire extended as far as the Ocean: It is he who (as they said) gave the Name of *Tbule* to the Isle now called *Iceland*. As his Empire probably reached thither, 'twas of a large Extent. This King puffed up with Pride at his Success and Prosperity, went to the Oracle of *Serapis*, and thus accosted

* *Suidas*.

it:

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it: Thou that commandest Fire, and governest the Course of the Heavens, tell me the Truth: Was there ever, or will there ever be, any one so puissant as myself?

The Oracle answered him thus.

First God, then the Word and Spirit, all uniting in one, whose Power can never end. Be gone hence immediately, Thou Mortal, whose Life is always uncertain. And Thulis at his going thence had his Throat cut.

Eusebius has collected from the Writings of Porphyrius, that great Enemy to the Christians, these following Oracles.

1. Groan ye Tripodes, Apollo leaves you; he is forced to leave you by a Celestial Light. Jupiter has been, is, and ever will be: Oh great Jupiter! Alas! My famous Oracles are no more.

2. The Voice can return no more to the Priestess, she has been already condemn'd to Silence this great while. Make such Sacrifices always to Apollo, as are worthy of a God.

Wretched

The History of Oracles. II

3: *Wretched Man*, said *Apollo* to one of his *Priests*, *Interrogate me no more concerning the Holy Father, nor his only Son, nor the Spirit which is the Soul of all Things: It is this Spirit that chaces me for ever from these Abodes.*

* *Augustus* being grown old, and designing to choose a Successor, went to consult the *Oracle* of *Delphos*. The *Oracle* returned no Answer, although *Augustus* spared no Sacrifice; but in the End he drew from it this following:

The Hebrew Infant, to whom all the Gods pay Obedience, chaces me hence, and sends me into Hell. Depart this Temple, and say no more.

It is easy to see, that upon the Credit of such Stories they could not doubt, that *Demons* employed themselves in pronouncing *Oracles*. This great *Pan* (who died in the Reign of *Tiberius*, as did *Jesus Christ*) was the Master of the *Demons*, whose Empire was ruined by the Death of a God of such Salvation to the Universe: Or, if this Explanation do not please you, (for

* *Suidas, Nicephorus, Cedrenus.*

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I hope we may without Impiety. put contrary Constructions upon one and the same thing, although it be of a religious Concern) this great *Pan* was *Jesus Christ* himself, whose Death caused so general a Grief and Consternation among the *Demons*, who from that Time could no more exercise their Tyranny over Mankind: Thus a Way has been found out to give two Faces very different to this great *Pan*.

Could the *Oracle* delivered to King *Tbulis* (an *Oracle* so positive concerning the Holy Trinity) be human Fiction? How could the Priest of *Serapis* have devined so great a Mystery, unknown then to all the World, even to the *Jews* themselves?

If these *Oracles* were delivered by Priests, who were Impostors, which obliged them to discredit one another, and publish the Cessation of their *Oracles*; is it not visible, that God forced the *Demons* themselves to bear Witness to the Truth? Besides, why did the *Oracles* cease, if they were only delivered by Priests?

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

The Second Reason why the Primitive Christians believed that Oracles were supernatural; and the Agreement of this Opinion with the System of Christianity.

THAT there are *Dæmons*, being once allowed by Christianity, it was natural enough to find them as much Employment as possible, and not to refuse them the Power of delivering *Oracles*, and working the other *Pagan* Miracles, which seemed to have need of it. Thus the Ancients saved themselves the Trouble of entering into a Discussion of Matters which would have been tedious and difficult; And all that was surprising and extraordinary, was ascribed to the *Dæmons* they had to do with: By this alone they seemed to confirm their Existence, and the Religion itself that reveals it to us.

Moreover, it is certain, that about the Time of the Birth of *Jesus Christ*, Mention is often made of the Cessation of *Oracles*

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cles even in prophane Authors. Now, why this Time rather than any other, was destined for the Cessation of them is very easily accounted for, according to the System of the Christian Religion. God had chosen his People out of the *Jewish* Nation, and left the Empire of the rest of the World to *Demons* till the coming of his Son ; but then, he deprived them of that Power, which he permitted them to have before. His Will then was, that every Knee should bend to *Jesus Christ* ; and that nothing should hinder the Establishment of his Kingdom over all Nations. There is something so happy in this Thought, that I do not wonder it has made so great a Progress. This is one of those Things, to the Truth of which we so easily give Credit, and which convince us, because we are willing to believe them true.

CHAP.

C H A P. III.

The Third Reason of the Primitive Christians, viz. The Agreement of their Opinion with the Philosophy of Plato.

N E V E R was any *Philosophy* more in Vogue than that of *Plato* during the First Ages of the Church: The *Pagans* were of different Sects of the *Philosophers*; but the Conformity which *Plato's* was found to have with Religion, carried almost all the knowing Christians into that Sect alone. Thence came their Esteem and Fondness for *Plato*: They looked upon him as a sort of Prophet who had fore-told many important Points of Christianity, especially that of the Holy Trinity; which no body can deny to be clearly enough contained in his Writings: Nay, they went so far as to take his Works for Comments on the Scripture; and had the same Conception

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tion of the Nature of the *Logos*, or *Word*, as he had. He supposed God so far exalted above the *Creatures*, that he did not believe they came immediately out of his Hands ; and therefore the Philosopher put between them and him this *Word*, as a Step, by which the Act of God might pass down to them : The Christians embraced the same Idea of *Jesus Christ* : And this may perhaps be the Reason why no Heresy has been more generally espoused, and maintained with greater Heat than *Arrianism*.

This *Platonism*, which seem'd to do Honour to the Christian Religion, fully maintained the Existence of *Demons* ; which was from thence naturally adopted into the Christians Notion of *Oracles*.

Plato thought *Demons* are of a Nature between that of the Gods and that of Men ; that they are aerial *Genii* appointed as Messengers between the Gods and us ; that altho' they are near us, yet we cannot see them ; that they penetrate into all our Thoughts ; that they have a Love for the *Good*, and a Hatred

tred for the *Bad*; and that it was for their Honour that such Variety of Sacrifices, and so many different Ceremonies were appointed.

It does not from hence appear, that *Plato* acknowledged any evil *Demons*, to which might be attributed the Management of the Imposture of *Oracles*. *Plutarch* notwithstanding assures us, that *Plato* owned there were such; and among the *Platonical* Philosophers, the thing is out of all doubt. * *Eusebius* in his *Evangelical Preparation*, recites a great Number of Passages of *Porphyrus*, where that *Pagan* Philosopher assures us, that the evil *Demons* are the Authors of *Enchantments*, *Philtres*, and *Witchcrafts*; that they only deceive our Eyes with *Spectres* and *Phantoms*; that Lying is essential to their Nature; that they raise in us the greatest Part of our Passions; and that they have an Ambition to be thought *Gods*; that their aerial and spiritual Bodies are nourished with Suffumigations, Blood, and the Fat of Sacrifices; and that it is only

* *Dialogues of the causing of Miracles*, lib. iv, v, vi.

these that undertake to give out *Oracles*, and to whom this Office so full of Impossure is allotted: In short at the Head of this Troop of evil *Demons* he places *Hecate* and *Serapis*.

*Jamblichus**, another *Platonist*, has said as much. And the greatest part of these things being true, the Christians received them all with Joy, and have added to them besides a little of their own: As for Example, That the *Demons* stole from the Writings of of the Prophets some Knowledge of things to come; and so got Honour by it in their *Oracles*.

This System of the ancient Christians had this Advantage, that it discovered to the *Pagans* by their own Principles, the Original of their false Worship, and the Source of those Errors which they always maintained. They were persuaded that there was something supernatural in their *Oracles*; and the Christians, who had Disputes with them, did not desire to confute this Opinion. Thus the *Demons* in whose Na-

* *Tertullian in his Apologies:*

ture both were agreed, helped to explain all that was supernatural in them. They acknowledged indeed this sort of ordinary Miracles wrought in the *Pagans* Religion; but then they deprived them of all the Advantage of it, by imputing them to such Authors. And this was a much more short and easy way than to contest the Miracle it self, by a long Train of Enquiries and Arguments. Thus I have shewn you how that Opinion which the first Ages of the Church had of the *Pagan Oracles*, was established. I might to the three Reasons, which I have already brought, add a fourth, as good perhaps as those: That is, that in the System of *Oracles* being given by *Demons*, there is something Marvelous: And whoever has studied the Humour of Mankind a little, will find how much we are taken with the Marvelous. But I do not intend to expatiate on this Reflection; for they who think upon it will easily believe me, without my being at any Pains to prove it, and those that do not, will perhaps give it no Credit, notwithstanding all my Proofs.

Let

Let us now examine the several Reasons which Men have had to believe *Oracles* to be supernatural.

C H A P. IV.

*That the surprizing Stories told of
Oracles ought to be suspected.*

IT would be difficult to account for those Stories and *Oracles* which we have mentioned, without having Recourse to *Demons*. But then the Question is, Whether all this be true? Let us be well assured of the Matter of Fact, before we trouble our selves with enquiring into the Cause. It is true, that this Method is too slow for the greatest part of Mankind, who run naturally to the Cause, and pass over the Truth of the Matter of Fact; but for my part, I will not be so ridiculous as to find out a Cause for what is not.

This kind of Misfortune happened so pleasantly at the End of the last Age,

to

to some learned *Germans*, that I cannot forbear speaking of it. “ In the
“ Year 1593, there was a Report that
“ the Teeth of a Child of *Silesia* of
“ seven Years old dropped out, and
“ that one of Gold came in the Place
“ of one of his great Teeth. *Horstius*,
“ a Professor of Physic in the University
“ of *Helmstad*, wrote in the Year 1595
“ the History of this Tooth, and pre-
“ tended that it was partly natural,
“ and partly miraculous, and that it
“ was sent from God to this Child, to
“ comfort the *Christians* who were then
“ afflicted by the *Turks*.” Now fancy
to your self what a Consolation this was,
and what this Tooth could signify, ei-
ther to the *Christians* or the *Turks*. In
the same Year (that this Tooth of Gold
might not want for Historians) one
Rullandus wrote the History of it:
Two Years after, *Ingolsteterus*, another
learned Man, wrote against the Opi-
nion of *Rullandus* concerning this gol-
den Tooth; and *Rullandus* presently
makes a fine learned Reply. *Liba-*
vius, another great Man, collected all
that had been said of this Tooth, to
which

which he added his own Opinion. After all, there wanted nothing to so many famous Works, but the Truth of its being a Tooth of Gold. For when a Goldsmith had examined it, he found, that it was only a Leaf of Gold laid on the Tooth with a great deal of Art. Thus they first compiled Books, and then they consulted the Goldsmith.

Nothing is more natural than to do the same thing in all other Cases. And I am not so much convinced of our Ignorance, by the things that are, and of which the Reasons are unknown, as by those which are not, and for which we yet find out Reasons. That is to say, as we want those Principles that lead us to the Truth, so we have others which agree exceeding well with that which is false.

Some learned Naturalists have found out the Reason why Places under Ground are hot in the Winter, and cold in the Summer; and greater than they have since discovered that this is not a Fact.

Historical Discussions are still more liable to this Error. For when we argue from what is said in History, what Assurances

surances have we that these Historians were not prejudiced nor credulous, nor misinformed, nor negligent? 'Tis necessary therefore that we should look out for one, that was an Eye-witness of all those things of which he writes, impartial and accurate. When Men write of such Facts especially as have a Relation to Religion, it is very hard not to favour (according to the Party of which they are) a false Religion with Advantages that are not due to it; or not to give a true one those false Props of which it has no need. And yet we may be assured that we can never add more Truth to what is true already, nor make that true which is false.

Some Christians in the first Ages, for want of being informed or convinced of this Maxim, were so prepossessed in Favour of Christianity, as to introduce very bold Suppositions which the sounder Part of Christians afterwards disowned. This inconsiderate Zeal produced a vast Number of Apocryphal Books, to which were given the Names of *Pagan* or *Jewish* Authors; for the Church, having to deal with these two sorts of Enemies,

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mies, what could she do better than to fight them with their own Weapons, by producing Books, which, tho' written, as was pretended, by their Party, where nevertheless very much in Favour of Christianity? But by all their Struggle to draw from these counterfeit Works some very great Benefit to their Religion, they gained none at all; for the Clearness of their Stile, betray'd them; and our Mysteries are therein so plainly unfolded, as if the Prophets of the Old and New Testament understood nothing in comparison of those *Jewish* and *Pagan* Authors. And what Plea so ever may be urged to save the Reputation of those Books, too great Clearness will always appear in them, a Difficulty not to be surmounted. As some Christians fathered spurious Books on *Pagans* and *Jews*, *Heretics* made no scruple to father theirs on the Orthodox. There was nothing to be met with but false Gospels false Epistles of the *Apostles*, and false Histories of their Lives; and it can only be ascribed to the Divine Providence that the Truth has been separated from

so many Apocryphal Works, as confounded it.

Some great Men of the Church have sometimes been deceived both by the spurious Works of *Heretics* fathered upon the Orthodox, and by what the Christians fathered upon the *Pagans* or *Jews*; but ofteneft by the latter. For they seldom examined strictly enough what they thought fayourable to Religion; the Heat with which they contested for fo good a Cause, not giving them the Liberty always to make a good Choice of their Weapons. This is the Reason that they have happened sometimes to make use of the Books of the *Sibyls*, or of those of *Hermes Trismegistus* King of *Egypt*.

This is not meant to lessen the Authority, or to censure the Merit of those great Men. For after having observed all the Errors into which perhaps they have fallen, in some Facts there will still remain abundance of solid Reasonings, and very curious Discoveries, which are worthy of our highest Admiration. And if, with the true Proofs of our Religion, they have left us others

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which may be suspected, it is our Part to receive that only from them which is authentic; and to pardon their Zeal, who have furnished us with more Proofs than there was any Necessity for.

I am not at all surprized that this same Zeal made them believe that I know not how many *Oracles*, advantageous to to their Religion, which were current in the first Ages of the Church were true. The Authors of the Books of the *Sibyls*, and those of *Hermes Trismegistus*, were probably the Authors also of these *Oracles*; at least it was more natural to suppose them such, than the Authors of intire Volumes. The Story of *Thamus* is originally *Pagan*, and yet *Eusebius* and other great Authors have done it the Honour to believe it, tho' 'tis immediately followed in *Plutarch* with another so ridiculous as is enough to destroy it's Credit. For *Demetrius* says there, that most of the Islands near *England* are desert and consecrated to *Diemons* and *Heroes*, and that being sent by the Emperor to take a Survey of these Islands, he landed upon one of those that were inhabited; and

and that, a little time after his Arrival, there happened a Tempest and terrible Claps of Thunder and Lightning, which made the People of the Country give out that some one of their princial *Dæmons* was dead; because their Deaths were always attended with something strange and horrible. To this *Demetrius* adds, that one of those Islands was the Prison of *Saturn*, who was guarded there by *Briareus*, and was buried in eternal Sleep (which methinks should render the Giant a very needless Guard) incompass'd with an infinite Number of *Dæmons* waiting at his Feet as Slaves.

Has not *Demetrius* given a very curious Relation of his Voyage? And is it not pleasant to see such a Philosopher as *Plutarch* relate such Wonders so gravely? It is not without Reason that *Herodotus* is esteem'd the Father of History; all the *Greek* Writers, who are on that Supposition his Offspring, partake of his *Genius*. They have little Truth, but much of the Marvellous and Amusing. Be this as it will, if the Story of *Thamus* had no other Faults, it's being found in the same Treatise with the

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Demons of *Demetrius* were enough to damn it.

But besides this, it is not capable of a rational Construction. For if the great God *Pan* were a *Demon*, could not the *Demons* have notified his Death to one another without employing *Thamus*. Have they not other ways of informing one another of News? And moreover, can they be so imprudent as to expose their Misfortunes, and the Frailty of their Natures to Mankind? God compelled them to it, perhaps, you will say. Then God had some Design in it. But let us see what followed upon it; there was no Person convinced of the Error of *Paganism*, by having heard of the Death of the great *Pan*. It was agreed that he was the Son of *Mercury* and *Penelope*, and that it was not he that was acknowledged in *Arcadia* for God of All (as his Name imports;) and therefore though the Voice named him the great *Pan*, yet he was understood to be but the little *Pan*, whose Death was of no great Consequence, and does not seem to have been much lamented.

If

If this great *Pan* were *Jesus Christ*, the *Demons* only told Men the News of a Death so salutary to them because God compelled them to it. But what was the Effect of all this? did any one understand the Name of *Pan* in it's true Sense? *Plutarch* lived in the second Age of the Church, and yet no Person then knew that *Pan* was *Jesus Christ*, who died in *Judea*.

The Story of *Tbulis* is related by *Suidas* (an Author who has collected a great many Things, but ill enough chosen.) His Oracle of *Serapis* is guilty of the same Fault as the Books of the *Sibyls*; that is, of being too clear concerning our Mysteries. But after all, we are certain that this *Tbulis*, King of *Egypt*, was not one of the *Ptolomys*; and what then will become of the whole Oracle, if *Serapis* must needs be a God first brought into *Egypt* by a *Ptolomy*, who sent for him out of *Pontus*, as many learned Men pretended from very strong Probabilities? at least it is certain that *Herodotus*, who has written so much about old *Egypt*, does not mention *Serapis*, and that *Tacitus* relate

Relates at large how and why one of the *Ptolomys* brought from *Pontus* the God *Serapis*, which was then known nowhere else.

The Oracle said to be given to *Augustus* concerning the *Hebrew Child*, is by no means to be received. *Cedrenus* quotes *Eusebius* for it; but at this Day there is no such Thing to be found there. It is not impossible but *Cedrenus* might make a false Quotation, or quote some Work wrongly attributed to *Eusebius*. He is a fine Historian to relate upon the Credit of certain forged Acts of *St. Peter*, which were even current in his Time, 'That *Simon* the Magician had at his Gate a great Dog, which devoured all those that his Master would not have enter; and that *St. Peter* coming to speak with *Simon*, commanded the Dog to go and tell his Master in human Language, That *Peter* the Servant of God would speak with him: That the Dog went and performed that Command, to the great Amazement of such as were then with *Simon*. Nay, that *Simon*, to shew that he knew as much

‘ much as St. Peter, bid the Dog go
 ‘ and tell him, That he might enter :
 ‘ which the Dog immediately did.’
 Hence you may see what it is the
 Greeks called Writing of History. Or-
 drenus lived in an ignorant Age, when
 the Licentiousness of writing Fables
 with Impunity callied with the general
 Inclination of the Greeks.

But though Eusebius, in some Work
 of his, which has not come down to
 our Hands, had actually treated of the
 Oracle of Augustus, yet we find Eu-
 sebius himself is sometimes mistaken ;
 of which there are evident Proofs. The
 first Defenders of Christianity, *Jeshu*,
Tertullian, *Theophilus*, *Eodiam*, would
 they have said nothing of an Oracle
 so much in Favour of their Religion ?
 Had they so little Zeal as to neglect
 such an Advantage ? Nay even they
 who give us this Oracle, spoil it by
 adding, that Augustus on his Return
 to Rome caused an Altar to be set
 up in the Capitol with this Inscription,
This is the Altar of the only Son (or
Eldest Son) of God. Whence had he

* *Cedrenu*, *Suidas*, *Nicéph.*

the Idea of this only Son of God, of which the *Oracle* makes no Mention? In short, what is more observable is, that *Augustus* after the Voyage he made into *Greece*, nineteen Years before the Birth of *Jesus Christ*, never went thither again, and when he returned from thence, he was not in a Humour to erect Altars to any God but himself: For he suffered not only the * Cities of *Asia* to raise Altars to him, and celebrate Holidays in his Honour; but also that at *Rome* they should consecrate one to *Fortune Returning*, *Fortune reduci*, that was to say, to himself, and that they keep the Day of his so happy Return as a Festival.

The *Oracles*, which *Eusebius* relates from *Porphyrius*, seemed more perplexing than all the rest: For *Eusebius* would not have charged *Porphyrius* with *Oracles* of which he made no mention, and *Porphyrius*, who was so attached to *Paganism*, would not have quoted false *Oracles* concerning the Cessation of *Oracles* themselves, and to the Advantage of the Christian Reli-

* *Tacitus, Dion Cassius.*

gion:

gion: This is a Case, it seems, in which the Testimony of an Enemy has a great deal of Weight.

But on the other Hand *Porphyrius* was not so unskilful a Man, as to furnish the *Christians* with Weapons against *Paganism*, without being necessarily forced to it by the Consequence of some Argument; which does not appear to be the Case here. If these *Oracles* had been alledged by the *Christians*, and if *Porphyrius* owning that they were actually delivered, had denied the Consequences drawn from them, it is certain that they would have then been of very great Weight.

But it is from *Porphyrius* himself that the *Christians* (as appears by the Example of *Eusebius*) fetch these *Oracles*; that very *Porphyrius* who takes Pleasure to ruin his own *Religion*, and to establish another. The Truth is, this is suspicious of itself, and yet it becomes more so, by his pushing the thing so far; for we are told from him of I know not how many *Oracles* very clear and positive, concerning the Person of *Jesus Christ*, his Resurrection

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and Ascension. In fine, the most bigotted and learned of the *Pagans* hath given us abundant Proofs of Christianity; but we may well suspect so much Generosity.

Eusebius believed it a very great Advantage to be able to place *Porphyrius* at the Head of so many *Oracles* in favour of Religion; and he gives them us stripped of the Additions to them in the Writings of *Porphyrius*. How do we know, whether he did not refute them? If he had consulted the Interest of his Cause, he ought to have done it; and if he did not do it, certainly he had some hidden Intention.

It is to be suspected, that *Porphyrius* was wicked enough to frame false *Oracles*, and present them to Christians, with a Design of ridiculing their Credulity, if they should receive them for true, and think to support their Religion by such Props: And then he would have drawn Consequences from it of much greater Importance than those *Oracles*, and have attacked the whole Christian System with this Instance,

Instance, which however would not have been conclusive.

It is very certain, that this same *Porphyrius*, who furnished us with all these *Oracles*, maintained, as we have remarked, that they were delivered by lying *Spirits*; it may very well then be imagined, that he placed all the Mysteries of our Religion in the *Oracles*, purely to destroy the Credit of them, and to render them suspected of Forgery, as being attested by false Witnesses: I know the *Christians* did not take it in that Sense; yet since they had never proved by any Argument, that the *Demons* were sometimes forced to speak the Truth, *Porphyrius* was always in a Condition to make use of his *Oracles* against them. And therefore by the Nature of the Dispute, they ought to have denied, that there were ever any *Oracles*, as we do at this present. This is a plain Reason to me why *Porphyrius* was so profuse of *Oracles* in favour of our Religion. But what would have been the Success of the great Controversy between the *Christians* and *Pagans*, we can only conjecture, for all the Papers are not come to our

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Hands. Thus by examining things a little closely, we find that the *Oracles*, which were reckoned such Wonders, never were in being; of which I need not give any more Instances, all the rest being of the same Nature.



CHAP.

C H A P. V.

That the common Opinion concerning Oracles does not agree so well as it is imagined with the Christian Religion.

TH E Silence of the Scriptures concerning these evil *Demons*, which it is pretended were the Managers of the *Oracles*, hath not only left us at liberty to believe nothing of them, but naturally inclines us to believe the contrary; for can it be possible that the *Scriptures* would not have acquainted the *Jews* and *Christians* of a thing which it so extremely imported them to know, and which they could never have guessed at by their Natural Reason, that they might not be staggered in their own Religion, by seeing things so surprising in another. For I conceive that God only spoke to Men to supply the Weakness
of

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of their Understanding, which of itself was not sufficient for their Occasions; and that whatsoever he has not declared to them, is either of such a Nature that they may learn it themselves, or that 'tis not necessary they should know it. So that if the *Oracles* had been delivered by evil *Dæmons*, God would have made it known to us, to have prevented us from believing that he himself delivered them, or that there was any thing divine in false Religions.

David reproached the *Pagans* with Gods that had Mouths and spake not, and wishes that their Adorers, for a Punishment, might become like those they adored; but if these Gods had not only the Use of Speech, but also the Knowledge of Things to come, I see no Reason *David* had thus to reproach the *Pagans*, nor why they should be angry for being like to their Gods.

When the Holy Fathers inveigh with so much Reason against the Worship of *Idols*; they always argue from the Impotency of them; but if they had spoken, if they had predicted Things to come, then they ought not
to

to have contented their Impotency, but should rather have disabused the People, and confessed the extraordinary Power that was in them: In fine, would they have been so much to blame for adoring what they believed was animated by a divine Virtue, or at least a Virtue more than human? It is true, that these *Demons* were Enemies of God, but could the *Pagans* know that? As the *Demons* required Ceremonies that were barbarous and extravagant, the *Pagans* believed them fantastical or cruel, but nevertheless they believed them more powerful than Men; nor did they know that the true God offered Men his Protection against them. For the most part, they only submitted themselves to their Gods as to formidable Enemies, who were to be appeased at any rate; nor had this Submission and Fear been groundless, if the *Demons* actually gave Proofs of their Power over Nature. In fine, *Paganism*, though a Worship abominable in the Sight of God would have been but an involuntary and an excusable Error.

You

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You will say, if the false Priests always deceived the Laity, then *Paganism* was no more than a simple Error into which the credulous People fell, whilst their real Intention was to honour a superior Being.

But the Case is much otherwise; for it behoves Men to be on their Guard against Errors, into which other Men may lead them; but there is no Possibility of fore-arming themselves against those Errors into which they may be led by *Genii*, or *Demons* which are above themselves. The Light of my Reason is sufficient to examine whether a Statue speaks or not, but from the Moment that it does speak, I cannot help thinking it a Divinity. In a Word, God is only obliged by the Laws of his Goodness to protect me from those Impositions from which I cannot defend myself; as for other Things, it is incumbent on my Reason to do it's Office.

We see also that when God permitted the *Demons* to work Miracles, he at the same Time confounded them by working greater. *Pharaoh* was liable
to

to be deceived by his *Magicians*, but *Moses* was still more powerful than the *Magicians* of *Pharaoh*. The *Demons* never had more Power, or did more surprizing Things, than in the Time of *Jesus Christ* and the *Apostles*.

This hinders not but that *Paganism* with Justice hath been always called the Worship of *Demons*. For in the first Place the *Pagans* Idea of the Divinity, does not at all agree with the true God, but with the reprobate and eternally unhappy *Genii*. Secondly, the Design of the Heathens was not so much to adore the *first Being*, the Source of all Good, as those Evil Beings of whose Anger or Caprice they stood in Fear. In fine, the *Demons*, who have without Contradiction the Power of tempting Men, and laying Snares for them, countenanced as much as ever they could the gross Errors of the *Pagans*, and made them blind to palpable Impostures. From hence it is said that *Paganism* was upheld not by Miracles, but by the Tricks of the *Demons*; which supposes that in whatever they did there was nothing of Reality or Truth,
nor

nor of such Power as effectually to make a Statue speak.

Nevertheless, 'tis possible that God has sometimes permitted the *Demons* to animate Idols: but if this ever happened, God had his Reasons for it, which are always worthy of profound Veneration: but generally speaking there was never any such Thing. God permitted the Devil to burn the Houses of *Job*, and lay his Pastures desolate; to kill all his Cattle, to afflict his Body with a thousand Sores, but it must not therefore be said that the Devil is let loose on all those to whom such Misfortunes happen. When we talk of any Man's being sick or ruined we do not think that the Devil is concerned in it. The Case of *Job* is a particular Case, on which our Argument has no Dependence, and our general Reasoning never excludes the Exceptions that the Almighty Power of God may make to all Things.

It is apparent then that the common Opinion concerning *Oracles*, does not very well agree with the Goodness of God, and that it discharges *Paganism*
of

of great Part of the Extravagances and Abominations which the Holy Fathers always found in it. The *Pagans* might have said in their own Justification, that it was no Wonder they should obey those Spirits which animated Statues, and every Day performed a hundred extraordinary Things; and the *Christians* to take from them all Excuse, ought never to have yielded them this Point. If the whole *Pagan* Religion had been no other than an Imposture of the Priests, *Christianity* had an Advantage from the excessive Ridiculousness of it.

Besides, there is great Probability that the Disputes between the *Christians* and *Pagans* were in that State when *Porphyrus* confesses so freely that the *Oracles* were delivered by evil *Demons*: Of these evil *Demons* he made a double Use: He made use of them as we have already seen, to render those *Oracles* unprofitable and even disadvantageous to the *Christian* Religion, which the *Christians* thought were on their side; and besides he imputed all the Folly and Barbarity of an infinite number of Sacrifices, which
with-

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without ceasing they reproached the *Pagans* withal, to these cruel and crafty *Genii*. To prove therefore that *Demons* were not the Authors of the *Oracles*, is attacking *Porphyrus* in his last Intrenchments, and espousing the true Interest of *Christianity*.



CHAP.

C H A P VI.

*That Dæmons are not sufficiently
established by Platonism.*

IN the first Ages, Poetry and Philosophy were the same thing, and all Wisdom was contained in Verse. Poetry was no great Gainer by this Alliance, and Philosophy still less. *Homer* and *Hesiod* were the first Grecian Philosophers; and thence it is that the other Philosophers paid a very serious Regard to whatever they said, and never quoted them but with great Honour.

Homer very often confounds the Gods and *Dæmons* together: But *Hesiod* distinguishes four Species of reasonable Natures, viz. the Gods, the *Dæmons*, the Demi-Gods or Heroes, and Men. Nay, he goes farther yet, and notes the Duration of the Lives of *Dæmons*: For the Nymphs,
of

of which he speaks in the Place I am going to quote, are these *Dæmons*, and *Plutarch* understands it so.

A Crow, (says Hesiod) lives nine times as long as a Man, a Stag four times as long as a Crow, a Raven three times as long as a Stag, the Phœnix nine times as long as a Raven; and in fine the Nymphs ten times as long as the Phœnix. One would be apt to take this Calculation for a mere Poetic Conceit, unworthy the Reflections of a *Philosopher*, or the Imitation of a Poet; for there is in it neither Agreeableness nor Truth: But *Plutarch* is not of this Opinion; for as he found, that supposing the Life of Man to be seventy Years, (which is its ordinary Duration,) the *Dæmons* then ought to live six hundred and eighty thousand, and four hundred Years: And as he did not conceive how any Experiment of this so long Life of the *Dæmons* could be made, he rather believes that *Hesiod* by the Age of Man understood but one Year. The Interpretation is not very natural; but according to this Estimation the Life of the *Dæmons* is not above nine thousand,

thousand, seven hundred and twenty Years, and then *Plutarch* could easily conceive the Possibility of finding out how *Dæmons* could live so long. And besides, he remarks in the Number of nine thousand, seven hundred and twenty Years, certain *Pythagorean* Perfections, which render it altogether capable to denote the Term of the Lives of *Dæmons*. These were the so much boasted Reasonings of Antiquity. After the Poems of *Homér* and *Hésiod*, we find the *Dæmons* in the Philosophy of *Plato*, who can never be too much commended, since it is he of all the *Greeks* who has conceived the highest *Idea* of *God*; tho' even this plunged him in false Notions. Because *God* is infinitely exalted above *Men*, he believed that there must be middle Beings between him and us, to maintain a Communication between two Extremes so far distant, and thereby to convey the Operations of the Deity down to us. *God* (says he) resembles a Triangle, which has three Sides equal; the *Dæmons* are like a Triangle that has but two Sides equal; and *Men* are like a Triangle which has all three Sides unequal.

This

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This *Idea* is well enough fancied, if it were but as well founded.

But after all (may it be said) has not *Plato* reasoned justly? And do not we know for certain by the *Holy Scriptures*, that there are *Genii*, or Spirits, Ministers of the Will of *God*, and his Messengers to Men? Is it not wonderful that *Plato* should discover this Truth by the Light of his natural Reason?

I confess, that *Plato* has conjectured aright; nevertheless, I blame him for his Conjecture. Divine Revelation assures us of the Existence of *Angels* and *Demons*, but it is not within the Sphere of human Reason to assure us of it. He knows not what to make of the infinite Space which is between *God* and *Man*, and therefore he fills it with *Genii* and *Demons*: But with what shall that infinite Space be filled, which is between *God* and these *Genii*, or *Demons* themselves? For the Distance between *God* and any Creature whatsoever is infinite. And if the Action of *God* must traverse, as one may say, this infinite *Vacuum* to go to the *Demons*, it may as well reach even to *Men*, since they are farther off
but

but by very few Degrees, which bear no Proportion to the *first Distance*. When *God* treats with Men by the Ministry of *Angels*, it is not to be understood that *Angels* are necessary for this Communication, as *Plato* pretends; *God* employs them for Reasons, into which *Philosophy* can never penetrate, and which can never be perfectly known but by himself.

According to that *Idea*, which the Comparison of the *Triangles* gives us, we find that *Plato* framed this Notion of *Demons*, to the end we might mount from one Creature to another Creature more perfect, till at length we ascended to *God* himself. So that *God* would have but some Degrees of Perfection more than the highest Creature; but it is visible, that as they are all infinitely imperfect in respect of him, because they are all infinitely distant from him; so the Differences of Perfection which are between the Creatures, vanish as soon as they are compared with *God*; for what raises them one above another, does not bring them in any Proportion near to him.

D

And

And if we only consult human Reason, there is no need of *Spirits* either to transmit the Action of *God* to *Men*, nor of placing between *God* and us any thing that approaches him nearer than we can.

Perhaps *Plato* himself was not so sure of the Existence of his *Demons*, as the *Platonists* have since been. What makes me suspect this is, That he places *Love* in the Number of the *Demons*; for he often mixes Gallantry with *Philosophy*; and his Talent was not the meanest on that Subject. He says, that *Love* is the Son of the God of *Riches*, by *Poverty*: That from his Father he derives his great Courage, his exalted Notions, his Inclination to give, his Prodigality, and his Confidence in his own Strength, his good Opinion of his own Merit, and Ambition to have always the Preference. But that he derives from his Mother that Indigence which makes him always asking, that Importunity with which he asks, that Timidity which hinders him often from daring to ask, that Disposition which he has to Servitude, and that Fear of being despised, which he can never

never lose. This, in my Opinion, is one of the prettiest Fables that was ever invented. It is pleasant to find *Plato* sometimes writing in a Stile as gay and humorous, and that too with as little Solidity, as *Anacreon* could himself have done. This Description of the Pedigree of Love extremely well sets forth all the Fantasticalness of it's Nature: But we know not what to make of *Dæmons*, if *Love* must pass for one.

It does not appear that *Plato* understood this in a natural and philosophical Sense, nor that he meant that *Love* was a Being out of us, or extrinsical, inhabiting the Air: Certainly he meant this only in a gay Sense. And then we are at our Liberty to believe, that all his *Dæmons* are of the same kind with *Love*. And, since he wantonly mingles Fables with his System, he cares not much if the rest of his System pass for a Fable.

Hitherto we have only answered the Reasons urged for the Opinion that *Oracles* had something in them supernatural. We will now begin to confute this Hypothesis.

C H A P. VII.

That the great Sects of the Pagan Philosophers did not believe there was any thing supernatural in Oracles.

IF in the midst of Greece itself, where all Places resound with Oracles, we had maintained that they were but Impositions, no one would have been astonished with the Boldness of the *Paradox*; and we should have been in no need of taking any Measures to vent it in secret. The *Philosophers* were divided on the Subject of Oracles; the *Platonists* and *Stoics* were for them, but the *Cynics*, *Peripatetics* and *Epicureans* made a perfect Jest of them. Whatever there was of the Marvellous in the Oracles, half the wise Men of Greece were still at Liberty to believe nothing of them; and this notwithstanding the common Prejudice of the *Grecians*; which is a thing worth nothing.

* *Eusebius*

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**Eusebius* tells us that six hundred *Heathen Authors* wrote against the *Oracles*; but of all these, in my Opinion, *Oenomaus*, (of whom he makes mention, and of whom he has preserved some Fragments) is one, the Loss of whose Works is to be the most lamented.

In those Fragments of his that remain, it is pleasant to find this *Oenomaus*, full of the Cynical Liberty, arguing upon every *Oracle* against the *God* who delivered it, and calling him to an Account. See for Instance how he treats the *God of Delphos*, on his following Answer to *Croesus*:

Croesus, in passing the River *Halis*, shall subvert a great Empire.

In Fact, *Crasus* passing the River *Halis* attacked *Cyrus*, who, as all the World knows, fell furiously upon him, and deprived him of all his Dominions.

You boasted (says *Oenomaus* to *Apollo*) *in another Oracle delivered to Croesus*, *that you knew the Number of the Grains of Sand in the Sea*; you set a great Value upon yourself, because you saw from Del-

* *Lib. 4. of his Evang. Preparation.*

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phos, the Tortoise, which by Order of Cræsus was then dressing in Lydia. A noble Discovery this to be so proud of! But when you were consulted concerning the Success of the War between Cræsus and Cyrus, there you was at a stand. If you can devine what shall happen in Time to come, to what Purpose do you make use of Forms of Speech which cannot be understood? Do you not know that they will not be understood? If you do know it, you then take Pleasure to make us your Sport; if you do not know it, let us inform you, that you ought to speak more clearly, and that you are not understood.

I tell you also, as you chose to use Double Entendres, the Greek Phrase by which you express that Cræsus shall subvert a great Empire, is not well chosen, and that it can signify nothing else but a Victory of Cræsus over Cyrus. If things must needs happen, wherefore dost thou amuse us with thy Ambiguities? What dost thou do at Delphos, wretchedly employed as thou art in singing idle, useless Prophecies? To what Purpose do we make thee so many Sacrifices? What Fury possesses us?

But

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But *Oenomaus* is yet more out of humour with the Oracle which *Apollo* delivered to the *Athenians*, when *Xerxes* fell upon *Greece* with all the Forces of *Asia*. The *Pythian Oracle* gave them for answer,

“ That *Minerva* the Protectress of
“ *Athens* endeavoured all manner of
“ ways (but in vain) to appease the
“ Anger of *Jupiter*; but nevertheless
“ *Jupiter* for the Sake of his Daughter,
“ consented to suffer the *Athenians* to
“ save themselves in Walls of Wood;
“ and that *Salamine* should see the De-
“ struction of many Children dear to
“ their Mothers; either when *Ceres*
“ should be scattered abroad, or when
“ she should be gathered in.

Upon this *Oenomaus* loses all manner of Respect for the God of *Delphos*.

This Controversy between the Father and the Daughter, says he, is very becoming to the Gods! That there should be in Heaven such contrary Interests and Inclinations is excellent! *Jupiter* is angry with *Athens*, he brings down

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all the Forces of Asia against it; but if he could not have ruined it otherwise, if he had no more Thunder left, if he was reduced to borrow foreign Forces, how had he it then in his Power to make all the Forces of Asia come down against this Town? Yet after this he suffers them to save themselves in Walls of Wood; on whom then was his Anger to fall? what, on the Stones? Rare Diviner! With all your Conjuratⁿ you know not whose these Children shall be that Saramine shall see the Destruction of, whether Greeks or Persians; tho' they must be either of one or the other Army. Do not you at least know, that we shall soon see you don't know which? You conceal the Time of the Battle under these Poetical Expressions, When Ceres shall be scattered, or when she shall be gathered in. You think by this pompous Language to cast a Mist before our Eyes; but does not every body know that a Naval Battle must be fought either in Seed-time or Harvest; surely it will not be in Winter. But let what will happen, you will get your self off by the Means of this Jupiter, whom Minerva endeavours to appease;

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appease: If the Grecians lose the Battle, Jupiter was then inexorable; if they gain it, then Jupiter suffered himself to be appeased. When you say, Apollo let them fly to Walls of Wood, you counsel, you do not devine. I, who know not what Devination is, could have said as much as this. I should have judged indeed that the Fury of the War would fall upon Athens; and that since the Athenians had Ships, the best Thing they could do, was to abandon their City, and betake themselves to the Sea.

Such was the Veneration that some great Sects of the Philosophers had for Oracles, and for those very Gods they thought the Authors of them. It is very pleasant to think that all the Pagan Religion was no more than one Problem of Philosophy. Do the Gods take care of human Affairs, or do they not? The Question turns upon this main Point, whether we shall worship them or neglect them; the People have been universally for Adoration, and we every where see Temples and Sacrifices; yet a great Sect of the Philosophers

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losophers maintains publicly that these *Sacrifices*, these *Temples*, these *Adorations*, are all to no Purpose, and that the Gods, so far from delighting in them, take no Notice of them. There is not a *Grecian* who does not consult the *Oracles* concerning his Affairs ; but this does not prevent their being publicly treated in three great Schools of Philosophy as absolute Impostures.

Let me beg leave to carry this Reflection a little farther, which may serve for a fuller Discovery of the *Pagan Religion*. The *Grecians* in general had an extraordinary Genius, but they were fickle, curious, restless, and gave Way to Passion ; and, to declare my whole Opinion of them, their Wit overswayed their Judgment. The *Romans* had quite another Character ; they were solid, serious, and industrious, they knew how to pursue a Design, and could foresee the Consequences of it at a great Distance. I should not be surprized that the *Grecians* without thinking of Consequences, should rashly treat *pro* and *con* of every Thing ; that while they were making

ing Oblations they should dispute whether those Sacrifices could reach to the Gods; and that they should consult *Oracles* without being assured whether they were not meer Delusions. The Philosophers probably concerned themselves so little in the Government, that they took no Care not to shock Religion in their Disputes; and perhaps the People had not Faith enough in the Philosophers to abandon their Religion, or change any thing in it upon their Word. In fine, the predominant Passion in the *Greeks* was to discourse on all Subjects at all Events. Yet doubtless it is more astonishing that the *Romans*, and the ablest Men amongst them too, and who knew best of how much Consequence Religion was to Politics, should venture to publish Works that did not only call their Religion in Question, but also turned it into perfect Ridicule. I particularly point at *Cicero*, who in his Books of Devination has spared nothing the most sacred at *Rome*. After he had smartly rallied those whom he disputed with on

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the extreme Folly of consulting the Entrails of Beasts, he drives them at last to this Answer: That the Gods, who are almighty, change these Entrails in the Moment of the Sacrifice, to the end that we should by them know their Pleasure and Futurity. 'Twas the Answer given by *Chrysippus*, by *Antipater* and *Possidonius*, all great Philosophers and Chiefs of the Party of the *Stoics*. 'Ha! What say you?' cries *Cicero*; there are no old Women so credulous as you are.' Can you believe (says he) that the same Calf has the Liver in a good State, if chosen for the Sacrifice by one, and an ill one, if chosen by another? Can this State of the Liver be changed in an Instant, to be accommodated to the Fortune of those that sacrifice? Do not you perceive that the Victims are chose by Chance? Does not Experience tell you so? for it often happens that the Entrails of one Victim denote something that is fatal, and that those of another Victim which is offered up immediately after foretel Events most happy. What then becomes of the Menaces of the first Entrails? Or how are the Gods

Gods so soon appeased? But you will say, that in an Ox, which Cæsar one Day sacrificed, there was no Heart; and that since this Animal could not live without a Heart, it must of Necessity be that the Heart vanished just in the Moment of the Sacrifice. Is it possible that you should have Sense enough to know that this Ox could not live without a Heart, and yet have not enough to perceive that this Heart could not fly away in a Moment, I know not whither. And a little after he adds, Believe me, you ruin all Natural Philosophy by defending the Art of the Sooth-sayers; for on this Hypothesis it is not the ordinary Course of Nature that gives Birth and Death to all Things: And there are some Bodies which come from Nothing, and shall return to Nothing. What Naturalist ever held this Opinion, which however must be that of the Sooth-sayers?

I quote this Passage from Cicero, only to shew the extraordinary Freedom with which he insulted the very Religion which he himself professed. In a thousand other Places he shews no more Favour to the sacred Fowls, the Flight of Birds, and all the Miracles with

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with which the Annals of the chief Priests were stuffed.

Why did not they indict him for his Impiety? Why did not all the People abhor him? Why did not all the Colleges of the Priests rise up against him? One would think that among the *Pagans*, Religion was a meer Practice, the Speculation of which was very indifferent. Do as others do; but believe as you please. It is a very extravagant Maxim, but the People who were not aware of the Impertinence of it, were content with it; and the Wits submitted to it very willingly, because it did not cramp them.

We may see therefore that all the *Pagan Religion* was meer Ceremony, in which the Heart bore no Share. The Gods are angry, all their Thunderbolts are ready to be discharged, how shall they be appeased? Must we repent of the Crimes we have committed? Must we return into the Paths of that natural Justice which ought to be the Rule of all Men? Not at all; we need only take a Calf of such a Colour, cast at such a Time, and cut the Throat

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Throat of it with such a Knife, and this will pacify all the Gods: Nay farther, you may laugh at the *Sacrifice*, if you please, it will fare never the worse with you.

Probably the Case was the same with the *Oracles*: Though every one believed as he list; yet they consulted them: So great a Force has Custom over the Minds of Men, that there is no need of Reason to join with it.



CHAP.

C H A P. VIII.

That other Men besides Philosophers have had little Esteem for Oracles.

WE read of abundance of *Oracles* in History, which were either despised by those that received them, or modelled to their Fancy *. *Paëlias* a *Lydian*, and Subject of the *Persians*, being fled for Refuge to *Cumæ*, a *Greek Town*, the *Persians* sent to have him delivered up; the *Cumæans* presently consulted the *Oracles* of the *Branchides*, to know what they ought to do with him; the *Oracle* answered, that they should deliver up *Paëlias*. *Aristodocus*, one of the principal *Cumæans*, who was not for it, had so much Credit as to obtain a second Message to the *Oracle*, and caused himself to be made one of the Depu-

* Herodot. Book the first.

ties ; but the Oracle returned the same Answer as before. *Aristodicus* dissatisfied with this, took it into his Head as he was walking about the Temple to fright away some little Birds which were building their Nests there ; whereupon he presently heard a Voice from the Sanctuary, crying, *Detestable Mortal, how dare you fright from this Place those who are under my Protection ? And why then, great God, replied Aristodicus very quick, do you order us to expel Pactias, who is under Ours ? Verily (answered the God) I order it, to the end that you who are an impious People may be the sooner destroyed ; and that you may come no more to trouble Oracles with your Affairs.* It seems that the God was pressed home, since he had recourse to railing ; but it appears also that *Aristodicus* had not a very strong Belief that it was a God who gave these Oracles, because he thought to entrap him by the Comparison of the Birds ; and after he had really caught him in a Snare, it is likely that he believed him less a God than he did before. The *Cumeans* themselves were not much per-

persuaded of his being a Deity, since they believed a second Deputation might obtain a contrary Answer; or that at least he would think better of what he had to say next. By the way I observe that *Aristodicus*, when he laid his Snare for the God, must have foreseen that they would not let him fright away the Birds from so holy a Sanctuary without saying something to him; and that the *Priests* were extremely jealous of the Honour of their Temples.

The People of *Agina* * had ravaged the Coast of *Attica*, and the *Atbenians* prepared for an Expedition against them; at which Time there came an *Oracle* to them from *Delpbos*, threatning them with utter Ruin in case they made War with those of *Agina*, within the Compass of thirty Years; but when those thirty Years were past, they were only to build a Temple to *Aacus*, and to undertake the War, and then all things would succeed well. The *Atbenians*, who burnt with a De-

* Herodot. Lib. 5.

fire of Revenge, compounded with the *Oracle* for one half, and complied with that Part of it only, relating to the Temple of *Æacus*, which they built out of Hand; but as to the thirty Years, they slighted that, and applied themselves immediately to attack the *Ægeineans*, and obtained all the Advantages imaginable. This was not a single Person, who had so little Regard for the Authority of *Oracles*, but a whole Commonwealth, and that a very superstitious one.

It is not very easy to say what kind of regard the *Pagans* had for their Religion: Indeed we observed a little while ago, that they contented themselves with the Submission of their Philosophers to the Ceremonies; but this was not altogether true. I am not certain, that *Socrates* refused to offer Incense to the Gods, or that he did not act the same Part as other People at the public Festivals; but this I am sure of, that the People prosecuted him for his particular Sentiments in Religion, though they could only guess at them; for he never openly explained himself.

The

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The People knew well enough what was taught publicly in the Schools of Philosophy; how then could they suffer so many Opinions, contrary to the established Worship, and often even to the Existence of the Gods, to be there publicly maintained? At least, they knew perfectly well, what was play'd upon the Theatres; for those Representations were made for them; and surely the Gods were never treated with less Respect, than in the Comedies of *Aristophanes*. *Mercury* in *Plutus* complains that Sight was restored to the God of Riches, who had before been blind, and that *Plutus* now beginning equally to favour all the World, the other Gods, to whom People no longer made Sacrifices to obtain Wealth, were starved for Hunger: *Mercury* carries the Humour on so far, as to look out for some sort of Employment in a Citizen's House, that he might have wherewithal to eat. The Birds of *Aristophanes* are also very bold. All the Comedy turns upon this, That a certain City of Birds, which was designed to be built in the Air, would inter-

interrupt the Correspondence between the Gods and Men; render the Birds Ingrossers of the whole, reduce the Gods to the utmost Misery: I leave you to judge, if this be not all mighty devout. Yet this was the same *Aristophanes*, who endeavoured to excite the Populace against the pretended Impiety of *Socrates*: There is something very unaccountable that is often found in the Affairs of this World. It is evident by these Examples, and might be made more so by numberless others, if it were necessary, that the People were sometimes in a Humour to hear Jokes cast on their Religion: They performed its Ceremonies only to free themselves from those Inconveniencies which might have attended the Neglect of them; but it is evident, that in the main they had not much Faith in them: And they had just the same Respect for *Oracles*; for, most commonly, they consulted them, that they might have no more Occasion to consult them; and if the Answers were not accommodated to their Designs, they did not much trouble them-

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themselves to obey them ; so that, perhaps, it was not a clear Point even amongst the common People, that *Oracles* were delivered by a Divine Power.

After all this, it would be unnecessary to mention the Histories of those great Captains, who thought it no Crime to despise both *Oracles* and *Auguries*. And it is remarkable, that they were contemned even in the first Ages of the *Roman* Commonwealth, in those Times of happy Ignorance, when Men were so scrupulously bigotted to Religion, and when (as *Titus Livius* says in a Place which I am going to quote) *Philosophy*, which taught Men to despise the Gods, was not yet known.

* *Papirius* made War with the *Samnites*, and at that Time the *Roman* Army longed to come to a Battle. The sacred Chickens (forsooth) must be first consulted ; but the Eagerness to fight was so general, that though the Chickens eat nothing at all, when they were

* *Liv. lib. 29.*

put

put out of the Coop, yet they, who were appointed to observe the *Augury*, reported to the *Consul*, that they had fed very well: Upon this, the *Consul* promised his Soldiers both a Battle and Victory. Mean Time there arose a great Contest amongst the Keepers of the Chickens, about the false Report that had been made of the *Augury*. When *Papirius* heard it, he said, that, for his Part, he had received a favourable *Augury*, and that he would abide by it; that if what had been told him was false, they who took the *Augury* were to answer for it, and that all the Evil would fall upon their Heads. Immediately therefore he ordered that those Wretches should be placed in the Front of the Battle; and before the Signal for it was given, an Arrow (from what Quiver none knew) pierced the Keeper who had given a false Report of the *Augury*. As soon as the *Consul* heard this News, he cried out aloud, ———

“ The Gods are here present: The
“ Criminal is punished: They have
“ discharged all their Anger on
“ him, who deserved it, and we have
now

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“all the Reason in the World to hope
“the best.” Then immediately he
caused the Signal to be given, and
gained an entire Victory over the *Sam-
nites*.

It is very apparent, that the Gods
had a less Share than *Papirius* in the
Death of this poor Keeper; and that
the General had a Design, by his Death,
to encourage the Soldiers, whom the
false Report of the *Augury* might have
terrified; for the *Romans* were already
acquainted with the Tricks of this Kind,
in the Time of their greatest Simplicity.

It must be confessed then, that we
should be much in the wrong if we be-
lieve either the *Auguries* or the *Ora-
cles* more marvellous than the *Pagans*
themselves did. And if we do then
not think as meanly of them as some
Philosophers, and some Generals of the
Army, did, yet let us at least have such
Thoughts of them, as the People them-
selves sometimes had.

But some may object, did all the *Pa-
gans* despise the *Oracles*? No surely. And
because some particular Persons had no
Regard for them, is that sufficient in-
tirely

tirely to discredit them? To the Authority of those who did not believe them, we need only oppose the Authority of those that did.

But it may be answered, that these two Authorities are not of equal Weight. The Testimony of those who believe a Thing that is already established, contributes not to the Support of it; but the Testimony of those who do not believe it, is of Force enough to destroy it; for they who believe a Thing, may perhaps not know the Reasons that may be given against the Belief of it; but those who do not believe it, cannot chuse but know, why others believe it.

It is quite contrary, when a Point is established; for in that Case, the Testimony of those that believe it, carries more Weight with it than the Testimony of those who do not believe it; for it is natural to suppose, that they who believe it, must needs have examined it; and they who do not believe it, may not have considered it.

I will not say, that either in the one or the other Case, the Authority of those who believe, or believe not, is decisive ; all that I would say is, that unless Regard be had to the Arguments of the two Parties, sometimes the Authority of one will be preferable, and sometimes that of the other. For in the general, when a Man quits a common Opinion, or receives a new one, he must make some Use of his Reason, whether it be good or bad ; but there is no need of his making any Use of it to reject a new Opinion, or to adopt one that is already common ; for there is need of Strength to resist a Torrent, but to swim with the Stream is easy.

It avails not to the Credit of *Oracles*, that among those who believed something in them divine and supernatural, there were certain *Philosophers* of great Reputation, such as the *Stoics* ; for when *Philosophers* are once prepossessed with any Thing, they are more convincible than the common People, because they are alike blinded with the Prepossession, and the false Reasons, with which they support it. The *Stoics* in

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in particular (as proud a Sect as they were) held some Opinions for which they deserve Pity. How could they chuse but believe *Oracles*, who believed *Dreams*? The great *Cbrysippus* left no Articles out of his Creed, which would not have been equally believed by the most silly Wench in Life.



C H A P. IX.

That the ancient Christians themselves did not very firmly believe that Oracles were delivered by Demons.

ALTHO' it appears that the learned *Christians* in the first Ages were fond enough of asserting that *Oracles* were delivered by *Demons*, yet they often reproached the *Heathens* with being imposed upon by their Priests: The Thing must have been very true, since they asserted it, though this System of *Demons*, which they esteemed so favourable to them, should suffer by it.

Thus *Clement Alexandrinus* speaks in his third Book of *Tapistries*:

Boast, as much as you will, of your foolish impertinent Oracles, those of Claros, of Apollo the Pythian, of Didymus, of Amphiaraus, and of Amphilocus

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philocus. You may even add your Augurs, and Interpreters of Dreams and Prodigies. Shew us in the Presence of Apollo the Pythian, those Men who devined by Meal, or by Barley, and those who have been so esteemed, because they spoke in their Bellies. Let the Secrets of the Egyptian Temples, and the Necromancers of the Hetrurians remain still in Darkness, for they are certainly nothing but extravagant Impostures, and meer Cheats, as bad as Dice-playing. The Goats which are kept for Devination, and the Ravens which are taught to utter Oracles, are, as one may say, but Associates with these Jugglers, who cozen all Mankind.

Eusebius, in the Beginning of his fourth Book of his *Evangelical Preparation*, proposes at large the best Reasons in the World to prove, that Oracles could be no other than Impostures: And those very Arguments only I propose to be my Basis hereafter, when I come to treat of the Cheats of Oracles in particular.

Nevertheless, I must confess, that tho' *Eusebius* knew so very well how to

prove that *Oracles* could not be supernatural, yet he attributes them to *Demons*; and the Authority of a Man so well informed of the Reasons on both Sides, seems to be a very great Encouragement to the Party which he embraces.

But pray observe, that after *Eusebius* had very well proved, that *Oracles* could be no other than the Impostures of *Priests*, he assures (without either destroying or weakening those first Proofs) that for all this, they were generally delivered by *Demons*. But he ought to have quoted some unsuspected *Oracle*, which had been delivered in such Circumstances, that although many others might be imputed to the Artifices of *Priests*, yet that could not. But *Eusebius* has done no such thing. This is, as if he should say, I clearly see, that all the *Oracles* can be no other than Cheats; but yet I am not willing to believe them to be so; why? because it serves my Purpose, that the *Demons* should now and then enter into an *Oracle*. This is a very lamentable kind of reasoning. But, if *Eusebius* (in the
Cir-

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Circumstances of the Times he lived in) durst not have said openly, that *Oracles* were not the Works of *Demons*, but in seeming to maintain that they were so, he had insinuated the contrary as artfully as possible, the Case would have been different.

We are at liberty to guess either one or other, according to the Esteem we have of *Eusebius* : For my own part, I believe clearly, that he asserted the Oracular *Demons* at random, or from a Respect which he affected to have for the common Opinion.

There is a Passage of *Origen*, in his Seventh Book against *Celsus*, which sufficiently proves that he attributed *Oracles* to *Demons*, only in Conformity to the Times, and to the then State of the great Dispute between the *Christians* and the *Pagans*. I might (said he) make use of the Authority of *Aristotle*, and the *Peripatetics*, to render the *Pythian Oracle* very much suspected : I could from the Writings of *Epicurus*, and his *Señtaries*, pick out a great many Things that would discredit *Oracles*; and I could easily make it appear, that the *Greeks*

themselves made no great Account of them; but granting that they were not Fictions, nor Impostures, let us examine the Case a little more closely, and consider, whether there were any Necessity, that a Deity should have any Concern in them, and if it were not more reasonable to believe, that they were directed by evil Dæmons and Genii, Enemies to Mankind.

It is sufficiently evident, that *Origen* must naturally believe of *Oracles*, as we do; but the *Pagans*, who produced them for a Proof of the Divinity of their Religion, were far from allowing that they were the Artifices of their Priests: So that to gain a little upon the *Pagans*, there was a Necessity of giving up to them ~~what~~ they maintained with so much Obstinacy, and to let them see, that though there might be something of supernatural in the *Oracles*, yet there was no Reason to conclude, that a real Divinity was concerned in them; and then *Dæmons* were necessarily brought upon the Stage.

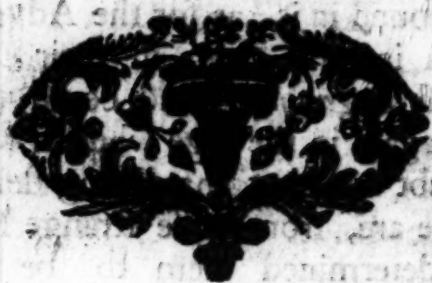
It is true, that, absolutely speaking, it had been much better wholly to have
excluded

excluded the *Demons* from *Oracles*; and that by this means a greater Blow would have been given to the *Pagan* Religion. But all the World perhaps did not enter so deep into this Matter, and it was thought sufficient when by the *Hypothesis* of *Demons*, which solved the whole Business in two Words, the Credit of all those Miracles, which the *Pagans* could alledge for their false Worship, was defeated.

This, it is probable, was the Cause, why in the first Ages of the Church, Men so generally embraced this Opinion concerning *Oracles*. We see clearly enough into the Darkness of remote Antiquity, to discover, that *Christians* did not hold this Opinion so much for the sake of Truth which they found in it, as for the Advantages which it gave them in their Disputes against *Paganism*: And could they be born again in the Age wherein we live, I doubt not, but that being delivered, as we are, from those strange Notions that determined them to be of that Opinion, they would almost all of them have thought as we do.

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Hitherto, we have only removed the Prejudices that are contrary to our Opinion, and which are derived either from the System of the *Christian* Religion, or from Philosophy, or from the general Consent of both *Pagans* and *Christians*. We have answered all this, not by acting merely on the Defence, but oftener by attacking; and now we shall make our Assault with still greater Vigour, and demonstrate by all the particular Circumstances which may be noted in the *Oracles*, that they never deserved to have been attributed to *Demons* or the *Genii*.



C H A P. X.

Of Oracles corrupted, or bribed.

IT was so easy a Matter to corrupt these *Oracles*, that it was very evident that they were managed by Men. The *Pythian Priestess* was called *Philippise* by *Demosthenes*, when he was complaining that the *Oracles* of *Delphos* were always conformable to the Interest of *Philip*.

* When *Cleomenes*, King of *Sparta*, had a mind to depose *Demaratus* the former King, on Pretence that he was not the Son of *Ariston* his Predecessor, and when *Ariston* himself complained that his Son was born a little too soon after his Marriage, the Oracle was consulted on so difficult a Question; and indeed the Thing was of such a Nature, that it could be decided only by the Gods. But *Cleomenes* himself

* Herod. Lib. 6.

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went

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went beforehand to the chief Priestesses of *Delpbas*, and she declared that *Demaratus* was not the Son of *Ariston*. The Cheat was some Time after discovered, and the Priestesses deprived of her Dignity; for they were bound to revenge this Dishonour done to the *Oracle*, and to repair its lost Credit.

* During the Time that *Hippias* was Tyrant of *Athens*, some Citizens whom he had banished, obtained of the *Pythian* Priestesses by a Bribe of Money, that when the *Lacedaemonians* should come to consult her (no Matter on what Affairs) she should always tell them, they must deliver *Athens* from Tyranny. And the *Lacedaemonians*, to whom the same Thing was always repeated, whatever they came about, believed at last, that the Gods would never pardon them, for the Contempt of Orders so often repeated, and thereupon took up Arms against *Hippias*, though he was their *Ally*.

As the *Demons* delivered *Oracles*, they never failed in Complaisance to

* Herod. Lib. 5.

those

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those Princes that were become formidable; and it is to be noted that *Hell* had a very great Regard for *Alexander* and *Augustus*. Some Historians tell us plainly that *Alexander* had a mind by his absolute Authority to make himself the Son of *Jupiter Ammon*, both to gratify his own Vanity, and for the Honour of his Mother, who was suspected to have had a Gallant not so considerable as *Jupiter*: And they add, that before he went to the Temple, he caused the God to be advertised of his Inclination, and that the God very graciously complied with it. Other Authors hold, that this was the Contrivance of the Priests themselves to please *Alexander*. There is none but *Plutarch* that grounds this Divinity of *Alexander* on a Mistake of the Priest of *Ammon*, who saluting this King, and intending to say to him in Greek *O my Son*, pronounced a *ν* for a *λ*, (for he was a *Lybian*, and knew not well how to pronounce the *Greek*;) which Words with this Change signify, *Ob Son of Jupiter* *. The whole Court

* *ν* *ναιδιν* for * *λ* *ναιδιν*

failed

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failed not to turn this Mistake of the Priest to the Advantage of *Alexander*; and without doubt the Priest himself made it pass for an Inspiration of the God who had directed his Tongue, and confirmed his bad Pronunciation by Oracles. The last manner of relating this Story is perhaps the best; for great Things are easily deduced from small Beginnings.

* *Augustus* was so much in Love with *Livia*, that he took her by Force from her Husband, big with Child as she was; and had not Patience to stay for her Delivery before he married her. The Action being something extraordinary, the Oracle was consulted about it; which knew well how to make its Court, and not only approved the Marriage, but affirmed that Weddings never succeeded better, than when the Bride was already with Child. This seems to me however a strange Maxim.

There were at *Sparta* but two Families, out of which they might chuse their Kings. But *Lyfander*, one of

* Pruden.

the

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the greatest Men that ever *Sparta* had, formed a Design to take away this Distinction, too advantageous for the two Families, and too injurious to all the rest; and to open a way to the Throne for all those who thought they had Merit enough to pretend to it. In order to this, he contrived so perplexed a Plan, that I admire how a Man of Sense could expect Success from it. *Plutarch* says very well, that it was like a mathematical Demonstration, to which no Man arrives but by long Circuits. There was a Woman in *Pontus* who pretended to be big with Child by *Apollo*; *Lysander* cast his Thoughts upon this Child of *Apollo*, intending if a Son should be born to make use of him (which shewed his Views to be very extensive) and he caused a Report to be spread, that the Priests of *Delphos* had in their Possession the ancient *Oracles* but were not permitted to read them, because *Apollo* had reserved that Privilege for some one that should come of his Blood, and repair to *Delphos* to have his Birth recognized. The Child of the Woman at
Pontus

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Pontus was to be this Son of *Apollo*; and it was contrived that amongst those mysterious *Oracles*, there was to be one found out, which should declare to the *Spartans* that they ought to give the Crown to Merit only, without any Regard to Families. Nothing remained now but to frame some *Oracles*; to bribe this Son of *Apollo*, who was called *Silenus*, to make him come to *Delpbos*, and to corrupt the Priests. All this was done; which seems very surprizing to me; for what strange Machines must have been made use of? *Silenus* was already in *Greece*, and prepared to go to make himself known at *Delpbos* for the Son of *Apollo*; but, as ill Luck would have it, one of *Lyfander's* Creatures, having a Terror upon him at last to find himself embarked in so delicate an Affair, spoiled all.

There is scarce a more remarkable Example to be found in all History of the Corruption of the *Oracles*; but in reporting it, I will not conceal a Truth that my Author says nothing of; which is, that *Lyfander* had before endeavour'd to corrupt many other *Oracles*,
but

but could not accomplish it. *Dodona* refused to take his Money, *Jupiter Ammon* was inflexible, and even the *Priests* of the Place sent Deputies to *Sparta* to accuse *Lysander*; but by his Interest he got clear of that Affair. The great *Priestess* of *Delpbos* herself refused to sell him her Voice. And this makes me still believe, that there were in *Delpbos* two Colleges, which held no Communication with one another, the one of *Priests*, the other of *Priestesses*; for *Lysander*, tho' he could not corrupt the great *Priestess*, bribed the *Priests* effectually. The *Priestesses* were those only who delivered the *Oracles*, *viva voce*, and acted on the *Tripas* like Furies; but in all probability the *Priests* had a Record Office of written *Prophecies*, of which they were the Masters, the Dispensers, and the Interpreters.

It is not to be doubted, but that the *Priests*, for the Honour of their Function were scrupulous sometimes to those who offered to bribe them, especially when things were required of them wherein there was no room to hope for much Success; such as was the Innovation

vation which *Lysander* had a Design to introduce into the Government of *Sparta*; and perhaps the Faction of *Agefilaus*, which was then against that of *Lysander*, was somewhat jealous of his Project, and had been before-hand with the *Oracles*. Was it to be imagined, that the *Priests* of *Ammon* would have taken the Pains to have come from the farthest Part of *Libya* to *Sparta*, to prosecute such a Man as *Lysander*, if there had not been a good Understanding between them and his Enemies, and if the latter had not pushed them upon it?



C H A P. XI.

Of the Establishment of new Oracles.

TH E new *Oracles*, which were sometimes erected did as much weaken the *Hypothesis* of *Demons*, as the old *Oracles* that were corrupted.

After the Death of *Ephæstion*, *Alexander*, to comfort himself, would needs have it, that *Ephæstion* should be deified: To which, all his Courtiers consented without any Difficulty: And immediately, Temples were erected in many Cities to *Ephæstion*, Festivals were instituted to his Honour, Sacrifices were made to him, miraculous Cures ascribed to him, and in fine (that nothing at all might be wanting) they made him the Pronouncer of *Oracles*. *Lucian* says, that *Alexander*, who was at first astonished to see the Divinity of *Ephæstion* pass so well, believed it himself at length to be true, and

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and hugged himself with the Thought that he was not only a God, but that he had also the Power of making Gods:

Adrian committed the same Folly for the Love of young *Antinous*: In Honour of his Memory he built the City of *Andrinopolis*, and he consecrated Temples and Prophets to him (says *St. Jerome* :) Now there were no Prophets, but in those Temples where there were *Oracles*. And there is yet remaining a *Greek* Inscription to this Sense.

TO ANTINOUS,

The Companion of the Gods of Ægypt. M. Ulpius Apollonius, his Prophet.

After this, we need not wonder, that *Augustus* also delivered *Oracles*, as we find it in *Prudentius*: And certainly *Augustus* was as venerable as *Antinous* or *Ephæstion*, who according to all Likelihood, owed their Divinity only to their Beauty.

Without

Without doubt, these new *Oracles* caused even those who were the least capable of thinking, to make Reflections upon them. Was there not Reason enough to believe, that these were of the same Nature with the old ones? And to make a Judgment of the Origin of those of *Amphiaraus*, *Trophonius*, *Orpheus*, and of *Apollo* himself, was it not sufficient to mark the Origin of those of *Ephesus*, *Antinous* and *Augustus*?

We do not find however, that these were in like Credit with the old ones; far from it.

These Gods of the new Creation were never applied to but when it was necessary for the complimenting of Princes; and for any thing else, they were not very seriously consulted: For when Questions of Importance were to be asked, they repaired to *Delphos*. The antient *Tripodes* had been in Possession of Futurity Time out of Mind; and the Word of an experienced God was far more sure, than the Declaration of such as were unexperienced.

The *Roman* Emperors, whose Interest it was to extol the Divinity of their Predecessors,

decessors, since they expected the same, would fain have rendered the *Oracles* of the deified *Emperors* (such as *Augustus* was) more celebrated; but the People, accustomed to their old *Oracles*, could not have the same Confidence in these; nay I am apt to believe, that, what Inclination soever they had to the most ridiculous Superstitions, they laughed at these new *Oracles*, and in general at all the Institutions of the new Gods: For how could they possibly imagine the Eagle, which flew out of the Funeral Pile of a *Roman* Emperor, to be the Soul of that Emperor, taking its Flight to Heaven?

How then came it to pass, that People were deceived at the first Erection of Gods and *Oracles*? For this Reason, as I conjecture. As for the Gods, *Paganism* had only two principal Sorts of them, viz. the Gods who were supposed to be essentially of a divine Nature, and the Gods which were originally of a human Nature. The former sort were declared Gods by the Wise Men, or by the Legislators with a Multitude of Mysteries; and the People neither saw

saw them then, nor ever before: The second Sort, tho' they had been Men in the View of the World, yet they were deified by the natural Inclination of the People, in Reverence of their good Works. They framed to themselves a very exalted *Idea* of the one, because they never saw them; and of the other, because they loved them. But they could not have that Devotion for a *Roman* Emperor, who was made a God by Order of the Court, and not by the Love of the People, and who besides this, was so lately a Man, and known to be such by the World.

As for the *Oracles*, their first Establishment is not more difficult to account for: Find me but half a dozen Persons, whom I can persuade that Day-light is not owing to the Sun, and I will not despair of whole Nations embracing the same Opinion: For, be an Hypothesis ever so ridiculous, and it be but maintained for some time, it gains the Character of Antiquity, and is then sufficiently proved. There was on the Top of *Parnassus*, a Hole, out of which issued an Exhalation, which made Goats dance,

dance, and got up into the Head. Perhaps somebody, whose Head was turned with it, fell a talking, without knowing what he said, and spoke some Truth. Immediately there must be something divine fancied to be in this Exhalation; and that it contained the Knowledge of Futurity; then, they begin to approach this Hole with Veneration, and by little and little Ceremonies are introduced.

Thus, in all Probability, rose the *Oracle of Delphos*. And as it owed its Origin to an Exhalation, which affected the Head, the *Pythian Priestess* could not help being in a Fury for prophesying; tho' in most of the other *Oracles* Fury was not necessary.

Let an *Oracle* be once established, and you may guess a thousand will follow the Example; for if the Gods can speak in one Place, why should they not do so as well in others? The People struck with the Marvellous of the Thing, and impatient for the Profit they expect from it, desire nothing more than to see *Oracles* set up every where; and in Time, all these *Oracles*

get

get the Character of being ancient, which stands them in great stead. The new ones had no such Success, since they were established by *Princes*; whereas the People are more inclined to believe in what they make themselves.

Add to all this, that at the Time of the first Institution both of the Gods and the *Oracles*, there was much greater Ignorance than afterwards. Philosophy was not yet known, and the most extravagant Superstitions had met with no Contradiction from thence. It is true, that those we call the Vulgar, are never mighty knowing; yet the Ignorance which they were always noted for was not the same in every Age. At least there are some Ages wherein all Mankind was the Vulgar, and those Times without Comparison are the most favourable for the Establishment of Errors. It is no wonder then, that the People had a less Esteem for the new *Oracles*, than for the ancient ones; but this makes not the old *Oracles* better or worse than the new ones. Either a *Demon* went to lodge in the Statue of *Hephestion*, to deliver *Oracles* from thence, as soon as it pleased *Alexander* to erect one to

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Hephestion,

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Hephestion, as to a God; or if the Statue delivered Oracles without this *Demon*, then that of *Apollo* the *Pythian* might do so as well. Now it would seem very strange and surprizing, that a meer Fancy of *Alexander* should alone be sufficient for putting a *Demon* in Possession of a Statue, and thereby opening a perpetual Source of Error to all Mankind.



C H A P.

C H A P. XII.

What Places Oracles were established at.

WE shall now enter into the Detail of the Frauds practised by the Priests; which includes many Passages of ancient History that are very entertaining and extraordinary.

Countries that were mountainous, and by consequence full of Holes and Cavities, abounded most with Oracles. Such was *Bæotia*, which anciently, as *Plutarch* says, had a very great number of them. By the way it is to be noted that the *Bæotians* were reckoned the most silly People in the World; and therefore it was a fit Country for Oracles, being full of Dunces and Caves.

I do not think that the first Establishment of Oracles was a designed Cheat; but the common People fell into a Degree of Superstition which gave

room for Men of brighter Parts to make an Advantage of it. For the Stupidity of the common People is often such as could not have been foreseen; and sometimes they who deceive them, think of nothing less, till they are even invited to impose upon them. And my Opinion is, that *Oracles* were not at first placed in *Baotia*, because it is mountainous; but that the *Oracle of Delphos* having been erected in *Baotia*, after the manner we have related, the others, that were set up in Imitation of it in the same Country, were placed also in Caves: because the Priests well knew how convenient they were for the Purpose.

This Custom afterwards spread itself almost every where; for the Pretence of divine Exhalations rendered Caves necessary: And besides, Caves of themselves seem to affect one with a certain Horror, which promotes Superstition. In Things that are only contrived to make Impressions on the Imagination of Men, nothing is to be neglected. Perhaps the Situation of *Delphos* contributed to the Reputation of its

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its being a sacred Town: It was built on a small Level which was half way up the Mountain of *Parnassus*, and encompassed with Precipices that fortified it without the Help of Art. That Part of the Mountain which was above it, had great Resemblance of a *Theatre*; and the Exclamations of Men, and the Sound of the Trumpets were multiplied in the Rocks. You must believe, that even the Echoes were of Use to them.

The Convenience of the *Priests*, and the Majesty of the *Oracles*, did therefore equally require Caves; so that there were not so many prophetic Temples in the flat Country; and where there were such Defects of Situation, the *Priests* knew well enough how to remedy it: For instead of natural Caves, they accommodated themselves with artificial ones, that is to say, what they called Sanctuaries, which were a sort of Caves, the particular Residence of the Divinity, and where none but the *Priests* ever entered.

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* When the *Pythian* Priestess placed herself upon the *Tripod*, it was in her Sanctuary, an obscure Place at some Distance from a little Room, wherein those stood who came to consult the *Oracle*. The Entrance of this Sanctuary was wholly covered with Branches of Laurel, by which means they who had the Liberty of approaching it, could not possibly see what passed within.

From whence do you think proceeds the different Account which the Ancients give of the Form of their *Oracles*? It is because they never saw what passed in the Inside of their Temples.

For Example, they are not agreed about the *Oracle* of *Dodona*, and yet what should the *Greeks* have known better? *Aristotle*, (as *Suidas* reports) writes, that at *Dodona* there were two Columns, upon one of which there was a Basin of Brass, and upon the other a Statue of a Child holding a Whip, the Lashes of which being also of Brass, made the Basin rattle, when they were moved by the Wind.

* *Plutar.* Dial. Of Oracles that were ceased.

Demon

Demon (according to the same *Suidas*) says, that the *Oracle* of *Jupiter* at *Dodona* is all encompassed with *Basons*, which, when any one is pushed against the next, the *Motion* is communicated all round to the rest, and they make a *Din* which continues for some *Time*.

Others say, that it was a *sounding Oak*, which shook its *Branches* and *Leaves* when the *Oracle* was consulted; and which declared its *Answer* by the *Priestesses* called *Dodonides*.

It is plain from all this, that there was nothing manifest but the *Noise*, because it was heard without; but not seeing the *Inside* of the *Place* where the *Oracle* resided, they only knew what caused the *Noise* by *Conjecture*, and the fallacious *Reports* of the *Priests*. Yet *History* shews, that some *Persons* had the *Privilege* to enter into these *Sanctuaries*; but they were *Men* of no less *Quality* than *Alexander* and *Vespasian*. *Strabo* reports from *Callisthenes*, that *Alexander* entered alone with the *Priest* into the *Sanctuary* of *Ammon*, and that all the rest heard the *Oracle* only without *Doors*.

Tacitus also relates that *Vespasian* being at *Alexandria*, and having formed a Design upon the Empire, would needs consult the Oracle of *Serapis*; but that before he entered, he made every body quit the Temple, and yet for all this, perhaps he did not enter into the *Sanctuary*. The Instances of this Privilege are therefore very rare; for my Author avers that he never knew of any other than these two; unless you will add what *Tacitus* says of *Titus*, to whom the Priest of the *Paphian Venus* would only discover in secret many great Things, concerning the Designs he had then in hand. But yet this Example is not so good a Proof as that of *Vespasian*, that the Priests allowed great Men the Liberty of entering into the *Sanctuary* of their Temples. Doubtless they must have been Men of great Power to whom the Priests could be prevailed on to discover their Mysteries; but they did it only to Princes, whose Interest they knew it was to keep the Secret; and who, in the Circumstances they were then in, had some particular Reason to extol the Oracles.

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In these dark Sanctuaries all the Machines of the Priests were hid; and they entered into them by Paths under Ground. *Rufinus* describes the Temple of *Serapis* to us, as full of covered Ways: And to bring a Testimony stronger than his, do not the Holy Scriptures tell us how *Daniel* discovered the Imposture of the Priests of *Bel*, who had a private Passage into his Temple, to take away the Viands there offered? This single Fact is enough, one would think, to decide the whole Question in our Favour; for we there have an Account of one of the Miracles of *Paganism*, which was the most universally believed, how that the Gods themselves took the Pains to come and eat the Victims. Do the Scriptures attribute this Prodigy to *Demons*? Not at all; but to the juggling Priests. This is the only Place where the Scriptures give any Description of a *Pagan* Miracle; and though they do not tell us that the rest were not of the same Nature, they give us plainly to understand that they were. After all, how much easier would it have been to persuade

the People that the Gods descended into Statues to speak to them, and gave them wholesome Instructions, than that they came to eat the Members of the Goats and Sheep? and if the Priests did really eat, instead of the Gods, they might with much more Reason pronounce the Oracles in their stead.

The Vaults of the Sanctuaries swelled the Voice, and caused rebounding Echoes, which imprinted Terror on all that heard it: You see also in all the Poets that the *Pythian* Priestess strained her Voice to a loud Pitch more than human. Perhaps too that sort of * Trumpet which multiplies the Sound, was not then altogether unknown: And it may be, Sir *Samuel Moreland* only revived a Secret, which the *Pagan* Priests knew before him; but chose rather to get Profit by concealing it, than Honour by divulging it. Father *Kirker* assures us, however, that *Alexander* had one of these Trum-

* Sir Samuel Moreland's *speaking Trumpet*.

pets, with which he made himself heard by his whole Army at one Sound.

One Thing I will not omit, which though but a Trifle, serves to demonstrate how much the Priests were addicted to cheating. * From the Sanctuary, or Inside of the Temples, there came out sometimes a very agreeable Vapour, which filled all the Place where the Consulters were: It was the Arrival of the God, you must know, that perfumed all. Judge then, if Men who carried on their Impostures so curiously as to descend to these minute Circumstances, would neglect any Thing essential.

* *Plutarch's Dialogue of Oracles.*



C H A P. XIII.

*Of the Distinction of Days, and
other Mysteries of Oracles.*

THE Priests neglected no kind of Precaution; and therefore they appointed certain Days on which no Man was permitted to consult the Oracle. This had a mysterious Air, which goes a great Way in such Matters; but the chief Advantage which they reaped from it, was, that they could put you off with this Pretext till another Time, if they had no mind to give you any Answer; or that during this time of Silence they took their Measures and made their Preparations.

On Occasion of these pretended inauspicious Days, there was delivered to *Alexander* one of the pleasantest Oracles that ever was. He went to *Delfos* to consult the God; when the Priestess, pretending that it was not a proper Time for it, would not enter into the Temple. *Alexander*, who was
very

very rough, took her by the Arm, to lead her in by Force; whereupon she cried out, *Ab, my Son, you are not to be resisted. I desire no more* (says *Alexander*) *this Oracle is enough for me.*

But the *Priests* had another Secret to gain Time when they pleased. Before the *Oracle* was consulted, there was a Necessity of sacrificing; and if the *Entrails* of the *Victims* were not lucky, the *God* was not yet in a Humour to answer. Who should be the Judges of those *Entrails* but the *Priests*, who, as it appears by many *Examples*, were commonly alone too when they examined them? And they often demanded a new Sacrifice, though the Animal already offered had the best Heart and Liver that could be wished.

What were called the *Mysteries* and secret Ceremonies of a *God*, were, without doubt, one of the best Artifices the *Priests* could have invented for their Security: And yet they could not so well hide their Juggle, but that the Cheat was suspected by many Persons; and therefore they contrived among themselves
to

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to establish certain Mysteries, which engaged those that were initiated into them, to inviolable Secrecy.

It is true, there were such Mysteries in those *Temples* where there were no *Oracles*; but many of the *Oracle Temples* had them: As for Instance that of *Delphos*. *Plutarch*, in the *Dialogue* so often quoted, says, that there was no Person in *Delphos*, nor in all that Country, that was not initiated into the Mysteries; so that all had a Dependence on the *Priests*; and if any one had dared to have opened his Mouth against them, he would have been branded for an *Atheist*, and a *wicked Man*; and involved in Troubles which he could never have got quit of.

If there had been no such Mysteries, the Inhabitants of *Delphos* would have been always obliged to have concealed the Knavery of their *Priests*; for *Delphos* was a *City* which had no other Revenue but that of its *Temple*, and subsisted only by its *Oracles*; but the *Priests* secured the People to themselves still more, by the double Tie of Superstition and Interest. If a Man had given
the

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the *Oracles* an ill Name, in such a Town, he would have had a fine Time on't!

They who were initiated into their Mysteries, gave Security for their Discretion; for they were obliged to make a Confession to their *Priests* of all the most private Actions of their Lives: and then the poor Novices became Petitioners to their *Priests* to keep them secret.

But a *Lacedæmonian*, who was going to be initiated into the Mysteries of *Samotheace*, said bluntly to the *Priests*: *If I have committed any Crimes, surely the Gods are not ignorant of them.*

Another reasoned much in the same Manner: *Is it to You, or to God, we ought to confess our Crimes? It is to God, says the Priest. Well then, retire,* said the *Lacedæmonian*, *and I'll confess them to God.* These *Lacedæmonians* were not extremely devout. But might not there have been some Man wicked enough to make a sham Confession, for the Sake of being initiated into their Mysteries, and then discover all the Folly of them, and expose the Imposture of the *Priests*?

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I believe that this Misfortune might have happened, and that the Priests used all possible Means to prevent it: They plainly saw with whom they had to do; and, I will warrant you, the two *Lacedemonians*, whom we have mentioned, were not admitted. Besides, they had declared the *Epicureans* incapable of being initiated into the Mysteries, because they were Men who made it their Business to ridicule them; and I do not believe they ever delivered out *Oracles* to them: Nor was it very difficult to discover them; for all the *Greeks*, who applied themselves ever so little to Literature, made choice of some Sect of *Philosophy*, and took a Surname from that Sect, almost like that which we assume from an Estate. For Example, there were three *Demetriuses*, thus distinguished; viz. *Demetrius* the *Cynic*, *Demetrius* the *Stoic*, and *Demetrius* the *Peripatetic*.

The Custom of excluding the *Epicureans* from all Mysteries, was so general, and so necessary for the Security of Things sacred, that it was made use of by that grand Impostor, whose Life *Lu-*
cian

cian describes so agreeably ; I mean that *Alexander*, who imposed upon the *Greeks* so long with his *Serpents* : He also added the *Christians* to the *Epicureans* ; for he thought one no better than the other : And before he began his Ceremonies, he always cried, *Let the Christians be turned out.* To whom the People answered, in a kind of *Chorus*, *Let the Epicureans be put out also.* Nay, he did far worse than all this ; for seeing himself tormented by these two Sorts of People, who tho' pushed by different Interests, yet conspired to turn his Ceremonies into Ridicule, he declared that *Pontus*, where he then lived, was full of wicked People ; and that the God, whose Prophet he was, would speak no more, if they were not turned out of it ; and upon this he fell foul upon the *Epicureans* and the *Christians* too.

The *Apollo* of *Daphne*, in the Suburbs of *Antioch*, was under the same Uneasiness, when in the Time of *Julian* the Apostate he answered all those who asked him the Cause of his Silence, that it was to be imputed to certain dead Bodies interred in the Neighbourhood. These

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These were the Bodies of Christian Martyrs, and particularly St. *Babiles*. Now it is the current Opinion, that the Presence of these Bodies of the Blessed deprived the *Demons* of the Power of speaking in the *Oracle*; but it is more probable, that the great Concourse of Christians to the Sepulchres of these Martyrs, incommoded the *Priests* of *Apollo*, who did not care that such clear-sighted Enemies should be Witnesses of their Actions; and that they endeavoured by this false *Oracle*, to obtain of the *Pagan Emperor*, that he would cause the Bodies, of which the God complained, to be cast out from thence.

But let us return to the Artificers of the *Priests*, of which the *Oracles* were full: And to comprehend in one single Reflection all that might be made upon them, let any one tell me, why the *Demons* could not predict what was to come, unless they were in Holes, in Caves, and in obscure Places? And why they did never animate a Statue, in some Cross-Roads, exposed on all Sides to the View of every body?

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It may perhaps be said, that those *Oracles* which were given in answer to sealed Letters, and those especially, that were delivered by *Dreams*, could not have been without *Demons*; but it will be very easy for us to shew, that they had nothing in them more marvellous than the rest.



CHAP.

C H A P. XIV.

*Of Oracles that were delivered in
answer to sealed Letters.*

THE *Priests* were not so scrupulous as to be afraid of unsealing the Letters that were brought to them. They were to be laid first upon the Altar; then the Temple was shut; which the *Priests* knew very well how to enter, without being perceived. Or else, the Letters were to be put into the Hands of the *Priests*, that they might sleep upon them, and receive in a Dream the Answer, that was to be returned to them. And in both Cases, they had Leisure and Liberty to open them privately. For the doing this, they had many secret Arts, some of which we see practised by the false Prophet of *Lucian*. And they are to be seen in *Lucian* himself, by any one that has the Curiosity to know how the

the Letters of the Ancients were to be unsealed, without its being perceived.

Certainly, they made use of some of these Secrets, to open the Letter that the Governor of Cilicia (of whom *Plutarch* speaks) had sent to the Oracle of *Mopsus*, which was at *Malla*, a City of that Province. The Governor knew not what to think of the Gods; for he was possessed by the *Epicureans* with many Doubts, which they had put into his Head: He resolved therefore, as *Plutarch* pleasantly observes, to send a Spy among the Deities, to learn what they were: So he gave him a Letter very carefully sealed, to carry to the Oracle of *Mopsus*. This Envoy slept in the Temple, where he saw in a *Dream* a comely Man, who said to him, *Black*. He carried back this Answer to the Governor; an Answer which seemed very ridiculous to all the *Epicureans* of his Court; but himself was struck with Astonishment and Wonder at it; and opening his Letter before them, he shewed them what he had written; which was this Question: *Shall I sacrifice a white or a black Ox to you?* After this Miracle,

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Miracle, he was all his Life very much devoted to the *God Mopsus*. We will hereafter discover to you the Mystery of the *Dream*; but it is sufficient at present to observe, that it is highly probable, that the Letter was opened and skilfully sealed again. There was a Necessity of carrying it to the *Temple*; but if a *Demon* was to make the Answer, it was needless for the Governor to send it.

If the *Priests* durst not venture to open the Letters, then they endeavoured, by their Cunning, to discover what Men came to the *Oracle* about; for they were commonly Persons of Note, who had some favourite Design or Passion that was pretty well known abroad. And the *Priests* had so much Conversation with them about the *Sacrifices*, or by Reason of the Delays that were to be used, before the *Oracle* answered, that it was not difficult to draw from their own Mouths, or at least to conjecture what was their Errand: They made them offer one Sacrifice after another, 'till they had got Light into their Affairs: They put them also into
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the Hands of certain petty Officers of the *Temple*, who, under Pretence of shewing them the Antiquities, the Statues, the Paintings, and the Offerings found the Art of making them blab out their Business. These Antiquaries, like those of that Calling now in *Italy*, were in all the *Temples* of any Note. They had learnt by Heart all the Miracles that were performed there; they made a pompous Display of the Power and Miracles of the *God*, and they told you a long Story of every Presence that had been consecrated to him. And therefore, *Lucian* says very pleasantly, that all the Men of this Sort lived and subsisted only on Fables; and that in *Greece* they would have been very sorry to have been told Truths, tho' it had cost them nothing. If they who came to consult the *Oracle* did not tattle, were their Servants silent? You must know, that in an *Oracle-Town*, there were scarce any Persons but *Oracle-Officers*: Some were *Prophets* and *Priests*; others Poets, who put into Verse the *Oracles* which were delivered in Prose; others, meer *Interpreters*; others, little *Sacrificers*,

Sacrificers, who offered up the Victims, and examined their Intrails; others, Sellers of Perfumes and Incense, or of Beasts for the *Sacrifices*; others, Antiquaries; and, in fine, others were but Inn-keepers, whom the great Resort of Strangers enriched. Now all these People were in the Interests of the *Oracle* and the *God*: And if by the Means of the Servants belonging to these Strangers, they discovered any thing worth knowing, you need not doubt but they told the Priests of it.

The Pseudo-Prophet, *Alexander*, who set up his *Oracle* in *Pontus*, had Correspondents as far as *Rome* itself, who sent him an Account of the most secret Affairs of those who came to consult him.

By this Means Answers might be returned even without receiving Letters. And such Methods were doubtless settled by the Priests of the *Apollo* of *Claros*, if it be true, that it was sufficient only to tell them the Names of those that consulted them. *Tacitus* speaks thus of them in his second Book of *Annals*: Germanicus went to consult *Apollo*

Apollo of Claros, where a Woman does not deliver the Oracles, as at Delphos; but a Man chose out of certain Families, and generally of Miletus; you need tell him only the Number and Names of them that come to consult him; and then he retires into a Grotto, and having taken some Water from a certain secret Fountain there, he answers you in Verse, to whatever you have in your Thoughts, tho' often he is very ignorant.

Here we may observe, that the Oracle of Delphos was committed to the Management of a Woman, because she had nothing else to do there, but to act as if possessed with a Devil; but because that of Claros had more Difficulty in it, therefore a Man only was to be intrusted with it. We may further remark, that the Ignorance of the Prophet, on which the Marvellous of the Oracle does in great Part depend, could not be very easily discovered; and that the *Dæmon* of the Oracle, as much a *Dæmon* as he was, could not dispense with the Knowledge of the Names of those who consulted him. But we are not come to that yet; it is sufficient to have shewn how

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they could answer, not only unsealed Letters, but even private Thoughts: It is true, they could not answer to the Thoughts of every body, and what the Priest of *Claras* did for *Germanicus*, he could not do for a meer Citizen of *Rome*.



CHAP.

CHAP. XV.

Of Oracles delivered in Dreams.

THE Number of Oracles which were delivered in Dreams is very great; for this Way had more of the Marvelous in it than any other, and yet was not very difficult in the Practice. The most famous of all these Oracles was that of *Trophonius* in *Boeotia*. *Trophonius* was but a simple Hero, but his Oracle was delivered with more Ceremony than those of any God. *Pausanias* himself, who had been to consult it, and who had passed through all its Ceremonies, has left us a very ample Description of it: And I believe, an exact Abridgment of it will not be disagreeable to the Reader.

Before any body descended into the Den of *Trophonius*, they were obliged to pass a certain Number of Days in a

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little kind of Chapel, called, *The Chapel of good Fortune, and of the good Genius.* During this Time they used Expiations of all Sorts; they abstained from hot Bathings; they washed very often in the River *Hercynas*; they sacrificed to *Trophonius* and all his Family, to *Apollo*, to *Jupiter* surnamed the King, to *Saturn*, to *Juno*, to an *European Ceres*, who had been Nurse to *Trophonius*; and they lived only upon the Flesh of the Sacrifices, which probably was all that the *Priests* lived upon. The Intrails of all these Victims were to be examined, to see if *Trophonius* thought fit to admit them into his Den; but if the Omens had been ever so lucky, yet it would not do; for the decisive Intrails were those of a certain *Ram*, which was to be sacrificed last; and if they were favourable, then the Consulters were led in the Night to the River *Hercynas*, where two Children about thirteen or fourteen Years old rubbed all their Bodies over with Oil; then they conducted them to the Source of the River, and there they made them drink of two sorts of Waters; those of *Lethe*, which obliterated

obliterated all the prophane Thoughts that before possessed them; and those of *Mnemosyne*, which had the Virtue to make them remember whatsoever they should see in the sacred Den. After all these Preparatives, they were shewed the Statue of *Trophonius*, to which they made their Prayers; and then they were covered with a Linen Vest, which was girt about them with certain sacred *Fillets*, and at last they went to the Oracle.

The Oracle stood upon a Mountain, and was encompassed with a Wall of white Stones, upon which were erected Obelisks of Brass; within this Circle was a Cave of the Shape of an Oven, cut out by the Hand of Man, whose Entrance was so strait, that they did not descend into it by Stairs, but by little Ladders, and when they were come to the Bottom, they found another little Cave, whose Entrance was also narrow: Here they laid themselves flat on the Ground, and took into each Hand certain Compositions of Honey, which they were obliged to carry; then they put their Feet within the Opening.

of the little Cave, and immediately perceived themselves pulled into it with very great Force and Agility.

There it was that Things to come were declared; but not to all in the same Manner; for some saw, others only heard. After this they came out of the Den, creeping on the Ground as they entered in, with their Feet foremost. Immediately they were put into the Chair of *Mnemosyne*, where they were asked what they had seen or heard? Thence they were led back into the *Chapel* of the good *Genius*, being still quite amazed, and senseless; but recovering their Senses by little and little, they began to be able to laugh; for till then the Grandeur of the Mysteries, and the Divinity with which they were filled, had made them very grave; tho', for my Part, I think one may wonder how they could retain their Gravity so long.

Pausanias tells us, that there never was but one Man who entered into the Den of *Trophonius*, and did not come out again: This was a certain Spy that *Demetrius* sent thither, to see if there were any thing

thing in that holy Place worth the plundering. The Body of this poor Creature was afterwards found afar off from thence; for it had not been thrown out from the sacred Hole of the Den.

It is very easy for us to make Reflections upon all this; for what Leisure had not the Priests, during all the different Sacrifices they obliged Men to make, to examine if they were qualified for Entrance into this sacred Den? For certainly *Trophonius* made Choice of his Men, and did not receive every body. How did all these Washings, Expiations, and Night-walkings, and these Passages into their narrow, dark Caves, fill Mens Minds with Superstition, Dread, and Fear? How many Machines were set at Work in those dark Places? The Story of *Demetrius's* Spy assures us, that there was no Security in the Den for those who came not thither with honest Intentions; and that besides the sacred Passage into it, which was known to every body, there was a secret one, which was known only to the Priests. When Men were drawn in by their Feet, it was doubtless done by

Cords, which they were far from perceiving, for they could not put their Hands to feel what it was that drew them, because they were embarrassed with those Compositions of Honey, which they were obliged not to let go. Perhaps too those Caves were full of Perfumes and Odours, which disturbed the Brain; and the Waters of *Lethe* and *Adumorsyne* were also (it is probable) prepared for the same Effect, to say nothing of the Sights and the Noises which they might be terrified withal. When they came out from thence quite distracted, they talked of what they had seen or heard to People who, taking Advantage of the Disorder, collected what they pleased, changed it as they thought fitting, and, in fine, always interpreted it their own Way.

Add to all this, that of those Oracles which were delivered by Dreams, some required a Preparation by fasting, as that of *Amphiarus* * in *Attica*; that if your Dreams could not receive a probable Interpretation, they made you sleep over again in the Temple; that

* Philostratus, *Lib. 2. Life of Apollonius.*
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they never failed to fill your Head with Fancies fit to make you dream of Gods and extraordinary Things: And that, for the most Part, they made you sleep upon the Skins of the Victims, which perhaps were rubbed with some Drug, which had an Effect on the Brain.

But when the Priests, sleeping upon the sealed Letters, had themselves prophetic Dreams, the Matter is still more explicable. Indeed the Care the Pagan Priests took to hide their Impositions was superfluous; for if Men were credulous and stupid enough to content themselves with their Dreams, and to give Credit to them, there was no Necessity of letting others dream: And the Priests might have reserved this Privilege to themselves alone, without any Blame; for, considering what Sort of People they were whom they had to do withal, it was doing them too much Honour to cheat them with Precaution and Address.

Will you believe, that there was, in *Achaia**, an *Oracle* of *Mercury*, which was delivered in this Manner? After many Ceremonies, they whispered the God in the Ear, and asked him what Question they pleased. Then they stopt their own Ears with their Hands, went out of the Temple, and the first Words heard after they were come out, were taken to be the Answer of the God. But to the end that the Priests might the more easily cause them to hear what they pleased, without being discovered, this *Oracle* was only pronounced in the Night.

* *Pausanias.*



C H A P.

CHAP. XVI.

The Ambiguity of the Oracles.

ONE of the greatest Secrets of the *Oracles*, and one of the Things which plainly shews that they were managed by Men, is the Ambiguity of the Answers, and the Art that was used to accommodate them to all Events that might happen.

* When *Alexander* fell sick on a sudden at *Babylon*, some of his principal Courtiers went to pass a Night in the Temple of *Serapis*, to inquire of that God, if it were not proper for them to bring their King to him for a Cure. The God answered, that it was better for him to remain where he was. *Serapis* judged rightly; for if he had advised the bringing *Alexander* to him, and he had died by the Way, or in the Temple itself, what would they not have said? But if the King recovered

* *Arian. Lib. 7.*

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his Health at *Babylon*, what a Reputation it would have been to the Oracle! If he died, it might be said it was for his Advantage to die after the Conquests he could neither augment nor preserve. There was a Necessity of adhering to the last Construction, which did not fail to prove to the Advantage of *Serapis*, as soon as *Alexander* was dead.

Macrobias says, that when *Trajan* had a Design of attacking the *Parthians*, he was desired to consult the Oracle of the City *Heliopolis* about it, to which he need only send a sealed Letter. Now, though *Trajan* put no great Confidence in Oracles, yet he sent a sealed Letter thither, in which there was nothing written, and the Answer was also a Blank. *Trajan* being now convinced of the Divinity of Oracles, sends another sealed Letter, in which he demands of the God, whether he should return to *Rome*, after he had finished the War he had undertaken? The God ordered a Vine, which was one of the Offerings of his Temple, to be cut in Pieces, and carried to *Trajan*. The Event,

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Event, says *Macrobius*, was quite conformable to the *Oracle*; for *Trajan* dying in this War, his Bones, which were represented by the broken Vine, were carried back to *Rome*.

All the World knew for certain that the Emperor designed to make War with the *Parthians*, and that this was the only Business about which he consulted the *Oracle*: And the *Oracle* was so cunning, as to return him an allegorical Answer, and so general a one, that it could not fail of being true. For if *Trajan* had returned to *Rome* victorious, tho' wounded, or having lost a Part of his Soldiers; if he were overcome, and his Army put to Flight; if any Division had happened in it, or any Mutiny amongst the *Parthians*; if any had happened at *Rome* in the Absence of the Emperor; if the *Parthians* had been totally defeated, or only in part; or had been abandoned by any of their Allies; this broken Vine was wonderfully adapted to either of these different Cases; and it had been unhappy indeed if one of them had not fallen out. Yet I believe the Bones of
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the Emperor that were carried to *Rome*, and by which they explained the *Oracle*, were for all that the only thing of which the *Oracle* had no Thought.

This Vine puts me in mind of a kind of *Oracle* that accommodated itself to every Thing, an *Oracle* of which, as *Apuleius* tells us, the Priests of the Goddess of *Syria* were the Inventors. They made two Verses, the Sense whereof was this:

*The Oxen yok'd together, cut the Earth,
To make the Fields produce a fruitful
Birth.*

Now there was no Question, which they could not answer with these two Verses. For, if they were consulted upon a Marriage, it was the same Thing, *Oxen yoked together, and fruitful Fields*. If they were consulted about the Purchase of any Land, there are *Oxen* to till it, and *fruitful Fields*. If about a Journey; *the Oxen* are yoked together, and quite ready to set out, and *the fruitful Fields* promised great Gain. If one went to War, do not *these Oxen*
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under the Yoke, clearly signify, that you shall put your Enemies under the Yoke? Probably, this Goddess of Syria did not love to talk much, and had found out the Way to satisfy all Questions with one single Answer.

They who received these ambiguous *Oracles*, took the Pains very willingly to justify them, by adapting the Success to the Prediction. And often, that which had but one Sense in the Intention of the Pronouncer of the *Oracle*, was after the Event found to have two. And the Impostor could depend on those whom he cheated for saving his Honour. Thus, when *Alexander*, the Pseudo-Prophet, was asked by *Rutilianus*, what Preceptors he should provide for his Son? he answered, that he should let him have *Pythagoras* and *Homer*. *Rutilianus* took it in the plain Sense, that he should study Philosophy and the *Belles Lettres*. The young Man dying a few Days after, they represented to *Rutilianus*, that his Prophet was very much mistaken: But *Rutilianus* found out with very great Subtilty

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Subtilty that the Death of his Son was foretold by the *Oracle*, because it appointed *Pythagoras* and *Homer*, who were both dead, for his Preceptors.



CHAP.

C H A P. XVII.

The Cheats of the Oracles fully exposed.

IT is now needless to detect the Cunning of the Priests by Arguments that might be thought too refined. The Time has been when they were discovered to the Eyes of the whole World, viz. when the *Christian Religion* triumphed publicly over *Paganism* under the Christian Emperors.

Theodoret says, that *Theophilus*, Bishop of *Alexandria*, shewed the Inhabitants of that Town, the hollow Statues, into which the Priests privately crept to deliver their Oracles.

When, by Order of *Constantine*, the Temple of *Æsculapius* at *Ægea* in *Cilicia* was pulled down, they chased thence, (says *Eusebius*, in the Life of this Emperor,) not a God, nor a Dæmon, but the Cheat, that had so long imposed on the Credulity of the People. He adds, in general, that in the demolish-
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ed Idols; they found no Gods at all, nor *Dæmons*, nor so much as a melancholy Shade, or obscure Spectre, but only some Hay, or Straw, or Ordure, or the Bones of dead Men. It is from him that we learn the Story of *Theotechnus*, who consecrated in the City of *Antioch* a Statue to *Jupiter*, God of Friendship; which doubtless he contrived to deliver *Oracles*, since *Eusebius* says, that there were Prophets belonging to this God. *Theotechnus* by this Means got such Credit, that *Maximin* made him Governor of the whole Province. But *Licinius* coming to *Antioch*, and suspecting the Imposture, caused the Priests and Prophets of this new *Jupiter* to be put to the Torture; whereupon they confessed all, and both they and their Accomplices were put to Death, their Master *Theotechnus* suffering first. The same *Eusebius*, in the fourth Book of his *Evangelical Preparation*, says also, that in his Time, the most famous Prophets amongst the *Pagans*, and their most celebrated Divines, of whom some were also Magistrates of their Cities, were compelled by

by Torments to discover all the Apparatus of the Cheats of the *Oracles*. If we were now to treat of what the old Christians believed of them, all these Passages of *Eusebius* would, in my Opinion, decide the Question. They admitted *Demons* indeed in a certain general System, which served for their Disputes; but when they came to a particular Point of Fact, they spoke little of them, or rather flatly rejected them.

I do not believe, that there can be better Witnesses against the *Demons*, than the *Pagan* Priests themselves, and after what they have laid down, the thing seems to me to be clearly determined. I will only therefore add one Chapter concerning *Lois*; not to discover the Imposture of them, for that is comprehended in what we have already said of *Oracles*; and besides it is sufficiently apparent of itself; but that I may not omit a Species of *Oracles* very famous in Antiquity.

C H A P. XVIII.

Of the Lots.

LOT is the Effect of Chance, and, as it were, the Decision, or the Oracle of Fortune. But Lots are the Instruments made use of, to know what this Decision is.

These Lots for the most Part were a kind of Dice, whereon were ingraven certain Characters, or Words, the Explication of which was to be sought for in Tables made for that Purpose. The Manner of using these Lots was various: In some Temples they cast them out of their Hand, in others they were thrown out of an Urn; from whence came this Phrase so common with the Greeks, *The Lot is fallen.*

This throwing of the Dice was always ushered in by Sacrifices, and abundance of Ceremonies. The Priests, as it is probable, knew how to cog the Dice; but if they would not take that pains, they need only let them run as they

they would, since they were always Masters of the Explanation.

* The *Lacedemonians* went one Day to consult the Lots of *Dodona*, upon a War that they were undertaking; for besides the speaking Oaks, the Doves, the Basons, and the Oracle, there were also Lots at *Dodona*. After all the Ceremonies were past, just as they were going to cast the Lots, with a great deal of Respect and Veneration, a Monkey of the King of the *Molossi*, being got into the Temple, turned the Urn and Lots topsy-turvy; upon this the frightened Priestesses told the *Lacedemonians*; that they ought not to think of conquering, but only how to save themselves. And all Writers say, that the *Lacedemonians* never received a more unlucky Prefage.

The most famous Lots of all were those of *Præneste* and *Antium*, two little Towns in *Italy*.

At *Præneste* was *Fortune*, and at *Antium* were the *Fortunes*, which were Statues that moved of themselves, (according to the Testimony of *Macrobius*,

* *Cicero de Divin. lib. 2.*

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Book 1. Chap. 23.) and whose different Motions, either served for Answers, or declared whether it was fitting to consult the Lots, or not.

A Passage in *Cicero's* Second Book of *Divination*, which tells us, that they consulted the Lots of *Prænestæ*, with the Consent of Fortune, implies, that the Statue of Fortune could move its Head, or give some other Sign of its Intention.

We find also, that there were other Statues, which had this very same Faculty. *Diodorus Siculus* and *Quintus Curtius* say, that *Jupiter Hammon* was carried by fourscore Priests in a kind of golden Chair of State, to which hung Cups of Silver; that he was followed by a great Number of Women and Maids, who sung Hymns in the Language of the Country; and that this God, so carried by his Priests, conducted them, by some Motions, which Way he would have them go.

The God of *Heliopolis* in *Syria*, according to *Macrobius*, did the same: All the Difference was, that he would be carried by Men of the best Quality
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in the Province, and such as had a long time lived in perfect Continence, and had their Heads shaved.

Lucian, in his Treatise of the Goddesses of *Syria*, says, that he once saw an *Apollo* still more miraculous, who, being carried on the Shoulders of his Priests, took it in his Head to leave them below on the Earth, and to mount himself into the Skies. And this in the Sight of such a Man as *Lucian*, is of Consequence.

But I am so tired with discovering the Cheats of these *Pagan* Priests, and am so convinced my Reader is as weary of hearing it, that I will not spend any Time in considering how it was that they made their Puppets dance.

In the East, the *Lots* were Arrows, and to this Day the *Turks* and *Arabians* make use of them in the same manner. The Prophet *Ezekiel* says, that *Nebuchadnezzar* mingled his Arrows against *Ammon* and *Jerusalem*, and that the predicting Arrow flew against *Jerusalem*; a fine Way of deciding the
Question

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Question against which of the two Nations he should make War.

In *Greece* and *Italy*, they often drew the Lots from some famous Poet, as *Homer* or *Euripides*; And what first presented itself at the Opening of the Book, was looked upon to be the Decree of Heaven. History furnishes us with a thousand Examples of this kind.

It is also evident, that about two Hundred Years after the Death of *Virgil*, they set a great Value on his Verses, and began to believe them prophetic, and to use them instead of the ancient Lots of *Præneste*. * *Alexander Severus*, as yet a private Man, at a Time when the Emperor *Heliogabalus* was not much his Friend, received this Answer in the Temple of *Præneste* out of *Virgil*.

— *Si qua fata aspera rumpas,
Tu Marcellus eris.*

*If you can vanquish Destiny,
The Great Marcellus you shall be.*

Here my Author remembers, that *Rabelais* mentions the *Sortes Virgilianæ*,

* *Lampricius.*

Virgilian Lots, which *Panurgus* consulted on his Marriage: And he judges that Passage of the Book as learned as it is agreeable and jocular; he says, that the Trifles and Follies of *Rabelais* are many times of more Avail, than the most serious Discourses of others. I would not forget this Elogy, because it is a thing very singular to meet with, in the midst of a Treatise of *Oracles* that is full of Knowledge and Erudition. It is certain that *Rabelais* had a great deal of Wit and Reading, and a particular Art of treating learned Things as Trifles, and of relating silly Stories without being tiresome to his Reader. And it is a Misfortune that he lived not in an Age that would have obliged him to more Chastity and Politeness.

These Lots were afterwards in use amongst *Christians*, who consulted the Holy Scriptures for that Purpose, as the *Pagans* did their Poets. Saint *Augustin*, in his one hundred and nineteenth Epistle to *Januarius*, seems not to disapprove it, unless it be done for some secular Affair. *Gregory of Tours* tells us

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himself

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himself what his Practice was : He passed several Days in Fasting and Prayer ; afterwards he went to the Tomb of St. *Martin*, where he opened some Book of the Scripture as his Fancy led him, and took the first Passage which offered itself to his View for the Answer of God ; and if this Passage made nothing for his Purpose, then he opened the Bible in another Place.

Others took the first Thing they heard sung when they entered into the Church, for a divine Lot.

But who would believe that the Emperor * *Heraclius*, deliberating in what Place he should winter his Army, should determine it by this kind of Lot ? He purify'd his Army for three Days, and afterwards opened the Book of the Gospels, and there found that *Albania* was marked out for his Winter Quarters. Was that an Affair of which a Man could hope for a Decision in the Scriptures ?

At last indeed the Church has quite banished this Superstition, but it took up a great deal of Time first : For when once our Minds are pos-

* *Cedrenus.*

essed

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fessed with an Error, it is long before
it can be eradicated, if ever.

The End of the first Dissertation.



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Second DISSERTATION.

*That the Oracles did not cease at
the coming of Jesus Christ.*

TH E greatest Difficulty that regards *Oracles* is now surmounted, since we have proved that *Demons* were not at all concerned in them. And consequently, as *Oracles* signify so little to the *Christian Religion*, it is not very material to prove whether they ceased precisely at the coming of *Jesus Christ*, or not.

C H A P.

C H A P. I.

The Weakness of the Arguments in Support of the Opinion, that the Oracles ceased at the coming of Jesus Christ.

THAT which induced most Men to believe that the *Oracles* ceased at the coming of *Jesus Christ*, was the Prediction by the *Oracles* themselves of their own Silence; and the Confession of the Heathens, who about the Time of *Jesus Christ* often declared that they were ceased.

We have already seen the Imposture of those pretended *Oracles*, in which a *Demon* that was struck dumb, said himself that he was dumb. These *Oracles* were either feigned by the too great Zeal of the *Christians*, or too easily received by their Credulity.

I will recite one of those *Oracles*, upon which *Eusebius* supports his Opinion, that the Birth of *Jesus Christ* silenced the *Oracles*. It is taken from *Porphyrius*;

phyrius ; and *Eusebius* never fails of making all the Advantage he can of the Testimony of this Enemy.

I will declare to you the Truth concerning the Oracles both of Delphos and Claros, (said Apollo to his Priests.) In Times past there came from the Bosom of the Earth an infinite Number of Oracles and Fountains, and Exhalations, which inspired People with Divine Fury ; but the Earth, by the continual Changes which Time makes in it, has reimbibed into itself all those Fountains, Exhalations and Oracles : And there remains now no more but the Waters of Mycale in the Didymean Fields, and those of Claros, and the Oracle of Parnassus.

Upon this, *Eusebius* concludes in general that all Oracles were then ceased.

But it is certain that three of them at least are excepted, according to this Oracle which he reports himself : But he takes Notice only of the first Words that make for his Purpose, and troubles not himself with the rest.

But

But does this *Oracle* of *Porphyrius* tell us, when the other *Oracles* ceased? not at all; though *Eusebius* chuses to understand it to be at the coming of *Jesus Christ*. His Zeal is laudable, but not his manner of arguing.

And suppose that *Porphyrius's Oracle* did speak of the coming of *Jesus Christ*, it would follow that many *Oracles* then ceased, but that however some remained.

Eusebius perhaps imagined that this Exception was of no Moment, and that it was sufficient that the greatest Part of the *Oracles* did then cease; but he is mistaken. If the *Oracles* had been delivered by *Demons*, who by the Birth of *Jesus Christ* were condemned to Silence, then no *Demon* would have been exempted, or privileged. If there was but one single *Oracle* remaining after the Birth of *Jesus Christ*, I desire no farther Proof that it was not his Birth that imposed a Silence upon the *Oracles*. This is one of those Cases, where the least Exception overthrows the general Proposition.

But perhaps it may be said, that though the *Demons* did cease to deliver *Oracles* at the Birth of *Jesus Christ*, yet *Oracles* continued still for all that, because the Priests counterfeited them.

This would be a Supposition without any Foundation; for I can prove that *Oracles* continued four hundred Years after the Death of *Christ*, and no Difference has been observed between those that were delivered after the Birth of *Jesus*, and those that preceded it. And besides, if the Priests could put the Cheat upon People for the Space of four hundred Years, why could they not do it always?

Of all the *Pagan* Authors who have most promoted the Belief that *Oracles* ceased at the coming of *Jesus Christ*, *Plutarch* is the chief: He lived some hundred Years after *Christ*, and wrote a Dialogue upon the Cessation of the *Oracles*. Many Men, upon that single Authority, have formed and fixed their Opinion; and yet *Plutarch* positively excepts the *Oracle* of *Lebadia*, (that is to say, of *Trophonius*) and that of *Delphos*: Where, as he says, there was
antiently

antiently Employment enough for two Priests, and sometimes for three, but that in his Days one served the Turn.

But he confesses that the *Oracles* were decayed in *Beotia*, a Country which had formerly been a very fruitful Source of them.

All this proves the Cessation of some *Oracles*, and the Diminution of others; but not the intire Cessation of all; which however there is an absolute Necessity for those to prove, who maintain the common Opinion.

The *Oracle of Delphos* was not however so mightily decayed in *Plutarch's* Time; for he himself tells us in another Treatise, that the Temple of *Delphos* was then far more magnificent than ever; that the ancient Buildings which Time began to ruin, were repaired, and others added to them in the modern Taste; that there was a small Town near *Delphos*, which increased daily by little and little, and had its Nourishment from that City, like a little Tree that pushes out at the Foot of a great one; and that this Town was become more considerable than it had been

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been for a Thousand Years past. But even in this Dialogue, which treats of the Cessation of *Oracles*, *Demetrius* the *Cilician*, one of the Interlocutors, says, that before he began his Voyage, the *Oracles* of *Amphilochus* and *Mopsus* in his Country were as flourishing as ever; but that since he came from thence he knew not what might have happened to them.

Thus you have seen all that is to be found in this Treatise of *Plutarch*; to which you are referred by so many Men of Learning for a Proof that *Oracles* ceased at the coming of *Christ*.

Here my Author pretends, that we are also fallen into a gross Mistake, concerning a Passage in the second Book of *Divinations*, where *Cicero* ridicules the Oracle said to be delivered by *Apollo* in *Latin* to *Pyrrhus*, who consulted it concerning the War he was going to make against the *Romans*. This Oracle had a double Meaning, so that it could not be understood, whether *Pyrrhus* was to overcome the *Romans*, or the *Romans* to overcome *Pyrrhus*. The double Entendre is so peculiar

liar to the *Latin* Phrase, that one cannot well render it into *English*; for my Part, I cannot translate it no better than thus:

*I do pronounce that Rome
Pyrrhus shall overcome.*

The very Words of *Cicero*, concerning this Oracle, are these that follow.

In the first Place, says he, *Apollo* never spoke *Latin*: *Secondly*, *The Greeks* knew nothing of this Oracle: *Thirdly*, *Apollo*, in the Time of *Pyrrhus*, had left off rhiming. *In fine*, although the *Æacides*, from which Family *Pyrrhus* was descended, were far from being Men of a very refined Genius, or of much Penetration, yet the Equivocation of the Oracle was so manifest, that *Pyrrhus* could not but perceive it. But what should be the Reason that Oracles were delivered in such a manner at *Delphos* long ago, so that now-a-days nothing is more despised?

It is on these last Words, the Opinion is grounded, that Oracles were no longer

longer delivered at *Delpbos* in the Time of *Cicero*.

But my Author says, it is a mistaken Notion, and that these Words, *What should be the Reason that Oracles were delivered in such a Manner*, plainly shew, that *Cicero* speaks only of Oracles in Verse; because he is treating of such a one in that Place.

But I know not whether we ought to be altogether of my Author's Opinion; for immediately *Cicero* proceeds thus: *When the Defenders of Oracles are hard put to it here, they answer, That this Virtue in the Exhalation of the Earth, which inspired the Pythian Priestess, with Length of Time is evaporated. One would think that they were talking of some Wine that was grown flat; for what Time can consume, or exhaust, a Virtue all divine? And what can be more divine than an Exhalation from the Earth, which works such an Effect upon the Soul, as to give it both the Knowledge of Futurity, and the Power to explain it in Verse?*

It seems to me, that *Cicero* means that the Virtue was intirely ceased: And he must have been sensible, that a
good

good Part of it remained, if *Oracles* were still delivered at *Delphos*, though but in *Prose*. Will any Man say, that a *Prophecy* is nothing at all, unless it be in *Verse*?

I do not think, that they are so mightily mistaken, who take this Passage for a Proof of the entire Cessation of the *Oracle* of *Delphos*; but it is wrong to pretend to draw any Argument from thence, for attributing this Cessation to the Birth of *Jesus Christ*. For the *Oracle* ceased too soon for that, since it appears, by this very Passage, that it had ceased a long Time before *Cicero*.

But, in Truth, the Fact is not as *Cicero* seems to understand it in this Place. For he himself, in his first Book of *Divination*, makes his Brother *Quintus*, who stands up for the *Oracles*, to speak in these Terms: *I insist upon this Point, that the Oracle of Delphos had never been so famous, and had never received so many Offerings from Kings as well as People, if the Truth of its Predictions had not, at all Times, been acknowledged. Now indeed it is not so famous*

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famous: As this is owing to its Predictions being not so true; so on the other Hand, if they had not been once true in every Respect, it would never have been famous to such a Degree as it has been.

But what is yet a stronger Proof, Cicero himself (as *Plutarch* relates in his Life) did in his Youth consult the Oracle of *Delphos*, as to his future Conduct in the World: And it was answered him, that he should follow his Genius, rather than be governed by the Vulgar Opinions. Now if it were not true, that Cicero consulted the Oracle of *Delphos*, yet at least it must be granted, that it was consulted in Cicero's Time:

C H A P.

C H A P. II.

Why the ancient Authors contradicted one another often, as to the Time of the Cessation of Oracles.

HOW comes it to pass, it may be said, that in the fifth Book of *Lucan's Pharsalia*, he speaks thus of the Oracle of Delphos? The Oracle of Delphos, which has been silent ever since great Men dreaded a future State, and forbad the Gods to speak, is the most considerable of all the Favours of Heaven, which our Age has lost. And a little after, Appius, who was desirous to know the Destiny of Italy, had the Boldness to go and interrogate this Cave, that has been so long mute; and to move this Tripos, that has been so long undisturbed.

How comes it, that *Juvenal* says in a certain Place, Since the Oracle at Delphos speaks no more?

In

° In fine, what should be the Reason, that among the Authors of one and the same Age, we find some who say, the *Oracle of Delphos* speaks no more, and others who say, he speaks still? And whence comes it, that the same Author sometimes contradicts himself upon this Subject?

Surely the Reason is, because *Oracles* were no longer in their antient Reputation, nor yet were they absolutely ruined: So, that in comparison of what they had formerly been they were nothing; but yet, for all that, they continued to be something still.

Besides, some *Oracles* were ruined for a while, and afterwards came into Credit again; for the *Oracles* were subject to various Accidents. They must not be supposed annihilated from the Time of their being mute; for they might afterwards resume their Speech.

Plutarch says, that in old Time a *Dragon* that came and lodged upon *Parnassus*, caused the *Delphic Oracle* to be deserted; and that it was commonly believed, that the Solitude of the Place tempted the *Dragon* thither; but that

that it was more probable, that the *Dragon* caused the Solitude, *Greece* being filled with Cities, &c.

You see that *Plutarch* speaks of a Time very far back. Therefore the *Oracle* had, since its Erection been once abandoned, and we are sure that afterward, it was re-established to a wonderful Degree.

But after this, the Temple of *Delphos* suffered divers Misfortunes. It was plundered by a Robber descended from *Phlegias*, by the Army of *Xerxes*, by the *Phocenses*, by *Pyrrhus*, by *Nero*; and, last of all, by the *Christians* under *Constantine*. All this, to be sure, was of no Service to the *Oracle*, for the *Priests* were either massacred or dispersed, the Place was abandoned, the sacred Utensils were lost, and it must of Necessity require great Charges, Care, and Time, to put the *Oracle* in *Statu quo*.

It is therefore possible, that *Cicero*, in his Youth, consulted the *Oracle* of *Delphos*; that during the War between *Cesar* and *Pompey*, and in that general Disorder of the Universe, the *Oracle*
was

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was mute, as *Lucan* will have it; and, finally, that after the End of this War, when *Cicero* writ his Books of Philosophy, it might begin to be re-established so far, as to authorize *Quintus* to say, it was still in the World; and yet so little, as to justify *Cicero* in supposing that it was no longer in being.

When *Dorimachus*, as *Polybius* reports, burned the Porticoes of the Temple of *Dodona*, quite destroyed the Sanctuary of the Oracle, and pillaged, or ruined all the Offerings, an Author of that Time might very well have said, that the Oracle of *Dodona* spoke no more. But for all this, in the next Age, another Author might be found reporting an Answer from it.

C H A P.

C H A P. III.

*The History of the Duration of the
Oracle of Delphos, and some other
Oracles.*

WE cannot better prove, that about the Time of the Birth of *Jesus Christ*, when the Silence of the *Delphic Oracle* was so much talked of, it did not altogether cease, but was only interrupted, than by setting down all the different Times in which we find it has spoke since.

Suetonius, in the Life of *Nero*, says, that the *Oracle of Delphos* warned him to have a Care of Seventy-three Years; that therefore *Nero* believed, he should not die till that Age, and never thought of old *Galba*, who, at the Age of Seventy three, took his Empire from him. Mean while *Nero* thought himself so fortunate, that having lost Things of a great Value, in a Ship-wreck, he boasted that the Fishes would bring them back to him.

But,

But, certainly, *Nero* either received from the *Oracle of Delphos* some other Answer, that he thought less favourable to him, or was discontented that he was to live no longer than Seventy-three Years, when he took the *Cithrean Fields* from the Priests of *Delphos*, to give them to his Soldiers; stripped the Temple of more than five hundred Statues of Men and Gods, all of Brass; and profaned, or for ever abolished the *Oracle*, by causing Mens Throats to be cut at the very Mouth of the sacred Cave from whence the divine Spirit issued.

That the *Oracle* after such an Insult on it as this, should be mute till the Reign of *Domitian*, so that, as *Juvenal* says, it spoke no more, is not at all to be wondered at.

And yet it is impossible it could be altogether mute from the Time of *Nero* to that of *Domitian*, by what *Philostratus* says in the Life of *Apollonius Tyanus*, who saw *Domitian*: *Apollonius visited all the Oracles of Greece, that of Dodona, that of Delphos, that of Amphiaraus, &c.* And in another

another Place he speaks yet farther : You may see Apollo of Delphos made illustrious by the Oracles which he delivers in the midst of Greece ; he answers those who consult him, as you know very well, in few Words, and without accompanying his Answer with Prodigies ; altho' it were very easy for him to make Parnassus tremble, to stop the Course of Cephisus, and to change the Waters of Castalia into Wine : He tells you the plain Truth, and does not make a needless Display of his Power. It is very pleasant, that Philostratus should think of enhancing the Merit of his Apollo, because he was no great Worker of Miracles. But probably some Poison was concealed in this Passage against the Christians.

We formerly observed, that, in the Time of Plutarch, who lived under Trajan, this Oracle was yet in being, but reduced to one single Priestess, tho' once it had two or three. Under Adrian, Dion Chrysostom says, that he consulted the Oracle of Delphos, and he relates one of its Answers, which seemed to him to be very intricate, and really was so.

Under

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Under the *Antonini*, *Lucian* says, that a Priest of *Tyana* went and asked of the Pseudo-Prophet *Alexander*, if the Oracles that were then delivered at *Didymus*, at *Claros*, and at *Delphos*, were really the Answers of *Apollo*, or Impostures. *Alexander* having a Regard for these Oracles, which were so like his own, answered the Priest, that it was a Secret not fit for him to know. But when this artful Priest demanded what he should be after his Death, he was answered boldly, *Thou shalt be a Camel, then a Horse, then a Philosopher, and at last a Prophet as great as Alexander.*

After the *Antonini*, three Emperors disputed for the Empire, *Severus Septimus*, *Pescennius Niger*, and *Clodius Albinus*. *Delphos* was consulted, says *Spartianus*, to know which of the Three would be best for the Commonwealth; and the Oracle answered in Verse, *The Black is the best; the African is good; the White is the worst.* By the *Black* was meant *Pescennius Niger*; by the *African*, *Severus*, who was of *Africa*; and by the *White*, *Clodius Albinus*. It was asked afterwards, *Who should remain* Master

Master of the Empire? and it was answered, *The Blood of the White and the Black shall be spilt, and the African shall govern the World.* Then it was demanded, *How long Time shall he govern?* and it was answered, *He shall ride on the Sea of Italy with twenty Ships, tho' with one Ship he may cross the Sea.* By which it is meant, that Severus should reign twenty Years. Here the Oracle reserved to itself an obscure Meaning, to have recourse to in Case of Necessity; but in short, when Delphos was in its most flourishing State, better Oracles were never delivered there than these.

We find nevertheless, that Clemens Alexandrinus, in his Exhortation to the Gentiles, which he composed, either under Severus, or about that Time, says very plainly, that the Fountain of Castalia, which belonged to the Oracle of Delphos, and that of Colophon, and all the other Prophetic Fountains, had at last, though late, lost their fabulous Virtues.

Perhaps at that Time, these Oracles were fallen into one of those States of Silence, to which by Intervals they were subject:

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Subject: Or perhaps, because they were out of request, *Clemens Alexandrinus* thought fit to say, they were totally extinct.

It is certain however, that under *Constantius*, the Father of *Constantine*, and during the Youth of *Constantine*, *Delphos* was not yet ruined; since *Eusebius*, in the Life of *Constantine*, makes him say, there was then a Report, that *Apollo* had delivered an Oracle, not by the Mouth of a Priestess, but from the Bottom of his obscure Cave, which said — *That the just Men, who were upon Earth, were the Cause, that he could no longer speak Truth.* A very pleasant Confession this! Besides the Oracle of *Delphos* must then necessarily be in a very miserable State, since it could not maintain one Priestess.

It received a terrible Blow under *Constantine*, who commanded, or else suffered, *Delphos* to be pillaged. Then, says *Eusebius* in the Life of *Constantine*, they produced to the View of all the People, in the Squares of *Constantinople*, those Statues, which, through the Error of Men, had been so long the Objects

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jects of Veneration and Worship: Apollo the Pythian, Sminthius, the Tripodes in the Circus, and the Heliconian Muses in the Palace; were all exposed to the Railleries of Mankind.

The Oracle of *Delpbos*, however, came into Credit once again; for the Emperor *Julian* * sent to consult it about the Expedition that he intended against the *Persians*. If the Oracle of *Delpbos* did continue longer, we cannot however extend its History farther: There is no more mention of it in any Author; but it is very likely, that was the very Time when it ceased, and that its last Words were addressed to the Emperor *Julian*, who was so zealous for *Paganism*. I do not therefore well understand, how some great Men could put *Augustus* in the Place of *Julian*, and boldly affirm, that the Oracle of *Delpbos* ended with the Answer it delivered to *Augustus* concerning the *Hebrew Infant*. Some modern Authors †, who thought this Oracle worthy of a glo-

* *Theodoret. Boissard. Hospin.*

† *Melancthon. P. Pencer.*

rious Exit, answerable to the great Figure it made in the World, have contrived such a one for it. They read in *Sozomenus* and *Theodoret*, that, in the Time of *Julian*, the Temple of *Apollo*, which was in the Suburbs of *Antioch*, called *Daphne*, was set on Fire, and that no body could discover the Author or Cause of it; so that the *Pagans* accused the Christians of it, and the Christians attributed it to Lightning darted by the Hand of God. *Theodoret* indeed says, that a Thunderbolt fell upon this Temple; but *Sozomenus* says nothing at all of it. Now, these modern Authors had a Mind to transplant this Accident to the Temple of *Delpbos*, which was very far from thence; and accordingly they write, that by the just Vengeance of God, it was destroyed by Lightning, accompanied with a great Earthquake. Yet there is no mention made of this great Trembling of the Earth, either by *Sozomenus* or *Theodoret*, in their Relation of the Burning of *Daphne*; and it is added to keep the Thunder Company, and to do the more Honour to the Accident.

It

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It would be very tedious to give a History of the Duration of all the other *Oracles* after the Birth of *Jesus Christ*. It is sufficient to note at what Time we find, that some of the principal *Ones* spoke their last. But it must always be remembered, that it is not understood, that this was the *very last* Time they spoke, tho' it was the last Occasion Authors had to tell us that they spoke.

Dion, who did not finish his History till the eighth Year of *Alexander Severus*, that is, in the 230th Year of *Jesus Christ*, says, that in his Time, *Amphilocus* still delivered *Oracles* in Dreams: He tells us also, that there was in the City of *Apolonia* an *Oracle*, where Things to come were foretold by observing the Manner how the Fire took hold of the Incense that was cast upon the Altar. But it was not permitted to ask this *Oracle* any Questions concerning Death or Marriage. These unaccountable Restrictions were sometimes founded upon the particular History of the God, who, in his Lifetime, perhaps had Reason to take an Aversion to some Things: Though I am

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also of Opinion, that they might sometimes proceed from the ill Success which those Answers had, that were delivered by the Oracle concerning some particular Matters.

* Under *Aurelian*, towards the Year of *Christ* 272, the *Palmyrenians* being revolted, consulted the Oracle of *Apollo* of *Sarpedon* in *Cilicia*. They consulted likewise that of *Venus* of *Aphaca*; the Form of which was singular enough to deserve the mentioning here. *Aphaca* is a Place between *Heliopolis* and *Biblus*. Near the Temple of *Venus* is a Lake like a Cistern: Where, at certain Assemblies had at set Times, is seen a Fire in the Form of a Globe, or of Lamps: And this Fire, says *Zosimus*, has been seen even in our Days, that is to say, about the 400th Year of *Jesus Christ*. The Consulters throw into the Lake the Present designed for the Goddess, of what kind soever it was; if she received it, it sinks to the Bottom; if she receives it not, it swims on the Surface of the Water, be it of Silver; or Gold. In the Year before the Ruin

* *Zosimus.*

of.

of the *Palmyrenians*, their Presents sunk to the Bottom; but the Year following they all swam on the Top.

* *Lucinius* having a Design to renew the War with *Constantine*, consulted the Oracle of *Apollo Didymæus*, and had for Answer two Verses of *Homer*, of which this is the Sense: *Poor old Man! It is not for thee to fight against young Men; thou hast not Strength enough, for old Age pulls thee down.*

† A God, of no Note, named *Besa*, delivered Oracles in Answer to Letters, at *Abydos*, a Town on the Confines of *Thebais*, under the Empire of *Constantius*. For there were sent to this Emperor certain Letters, which had been left in the Temple of *Besa*; upon which, he commenced a very rigorous Prosecution, imprisoned or banished a great Number of Persons, and some he caused to be cruelly tormented: For, by these Letters, the God was consulted as to the Fate of the Empire, or the Duration of the Reign of *Constantius*, or as to the Success of some Design on foot against him.

* *Sosom.*

† *Ammian. Marcellinus.*

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In fine, *Macrobius*, who lived under *Arcadius* and *Honorius*, Sons of *Theodosius*, speaks of the God of *Heliopolis* in *Syria*, and of his *Oracle*, and of the Lots of *Antium*, in Terms which positively prove, that they were all remaining in his Time.

But here we must observe, that it is of no Consequence to our Design, that all these Histories should be true, or that these *Oracles* did really deliver the Answers which are attributed to them; for false Answers could only be ascribed to the Oracles that were known to be still subsisting; and the Stories, which so many Authors have related of them, prove, at least, that they did not believe they were ceased.

CHAP.

CH A P. IV.

That the Oracles in general ceased
with Paganism.

O Oracles in general ceased only
with Paganism, which was not
immediately at the Coming of *Jesus*
Christ. For *Constantine* demolished but
a few Temples; and he was fain to
make the Crimes that were there com-
mitted his Plea for it.

On this Pretent, he pulled down the
Temple of * *Venus Aphacitis*, and that
of † *Asculapius* at *Agea* in *Cilicia*, in
both of which there were Oracles. But
yet he ‖ prohibited Sacrifices to the
Heathen Gods, and by that Edict be-
gan to make their Temples of no Use.

The Edicts of *Constantius*, and of
Julian (then Emperor) are extant,
whereby all kinds of Divination were
prohibited on Point of Death, not only

* *Zosimus*.

† *Eusebius*,

‖ *Theodoret*.

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that of the Astrologers, Interpreters of Dreams, and Magicians, but also that of the *Augurs* and *Soothsayers*; which gave a great Shock to the Religion of the *Romans*. And indeed the Emperors had a particular Interest in prohibiting all kinds of Divination, because one or other was always inquiring about their Destiny, and especially who were to be their Successors: And such Successor trusting to the Flattery of the Diviner, used to revolt, and set up a Claim to the Empire.

As there were many *Oracles* remaining while *Julian* was Emperor, so he applied himself, as much as he could, to the Restoration of those that had been demolished; that, for Instance, in the Suburbs of *Daphne*, which had been destroyed by *Adrian*, * who while he was but a private Man, having dipped a Leaf in the *Castalian* Spring, (for there was one of this Name at *Daphne*, as well as at *Delpbas*,) found when he took it out of the Water, a Narrative of what was to befall him, and Advice

* *Sozomen.*

to think of obtaining the Empire. And therefore, when he was afterwards made Emperor, for fear the same Oracle should give the like Counsel to some body else, he caused the sacred Spring to be choked up, by throwing a great Quantity of Stones into it. There was monstrous Ingratitude in this Procedure; but Julian* caused the Spring to be opened again, the dead Bodies, which were buried near it, to be removed, and purified the Place in the same manner as the Athenians had heretofore purged the *Island of Delos*.

Nay, Julian went farther, and would needs be himself the Prophet of the *Didymæan Oracle*; for this he thought would be a means of retrieving the Credit of Prophecy, which then lay under much Contempt. As he was Emperor, he was (*Pontifex Maximus*, or) Chief Priest; and though the Emperors had not been accustomed to make any great Use of this *Sacerdotal Dignity*, yet he thought it a much

* *Amianus Marcellinus.*

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more serious Affair : And therefore we see in one of his Letters, that in the Quality of *Pontifex Maximus*, he suspends a *Pagan* Priest for three Months from any sacerdotal Function. The Letter he wrote to *Arjoces*, *Pontiff* of *Galatia*, acquaints us with the Method he took to make *Paganism* flourish again : He congratulates himself in the first place, that his Zeal had produced such great Effects in so short a Time ; and then he declares his Judgment to be, that the best Expedient for the Re-establishment of *Heathenism* would be, to transplant the Virtues of *Christianity* into it, such as Charity towards Strangers, the decent Interment of the Dead, and that Sanctity of Life which the *Christians*, he says, so well counterfeit. He therefore recommends it to that *Pontiff* to oblige the *Priests* of *Galatia*, either by Arguments or Threats, to live regularly, to abstain from the public Shews, and Tipling-houses ; to quit all mean, or infamous Employments, to addict themselves, with all their Family, only to the Service of the Gods, and to have a watchful Eye upon the
Gali.

Galileans, in order to suppress their Impieties and Profanations. He observes, that it is a great Shame, that whilst the *Jews* and *Galileans* maintained not only their own Poor, but those of the *Heathens* too, the *Pagans* should let their Poor starve, and not remember, that Hospitality and Liberality are Virtues so peculiar and proper to them, that *Homer* brings in *Eumæus* speaking thus : My Guest, if a Man of a Degree much inferior to thine had come hither, I could not refuse to have entertained him; for all Men both Strangers and Poor come as if sent from Jupiter; and the little I have to give, I give with Pleasure. Last of all, he sets down what Distributions he appoints to be made yearly to the Poor of *Galatia*, and he bids the Pontiff take care, that there be Hospitals built in every Town for the Reception of other Men as well as *Pagans*. He thinks it beneath the Dignity of the Pontiff to make frequent Visits to the Governors at their Houses, and that he should only write to them; nor will he have the Priests go to meet them, when they enter any Town, but only

when they come to the Temples; and that there they go to receive them no farther than the Porch. He also forbids the Governors on such an Occasion to have Guards marching before them, because they are then no more than private Persons; but he gives the Soldiers Leave to follow them, if they will.

With this Care, and this Imitation of Christianity, it is probable, that if *Julian* had lived, he would have retarded the Ruin of his Religion; but God cut him off before he had reigned two Years.

Jovian, who succeeded him, set out zealously for the Destruction of *Paganism*; but in the seven Months of his Reign, he could make no great Progress.

Valens, who had the *Eastern Empire*, gave Liberty to all Men to worship what Gods they pleased, and was himself more inclined to support *Arianism* than *Christianity*. So that during his Reign Sacrifices

Throd. Lib. 5.

were^a

were publicly made, and Men as publicly eat the Flesh of the Victims. They who were initiated into the *Bacchic* *Mythical* Mysteries, celebrated them without Fear; they ran up and down with their Bucklers, tore Dogs in Pieces, and committed all the Extravagancies which that Devotion required.

Valentinian, his Brother, who had the *Western Empire*, was more zealous for the Honour of *Christianity*; yet his Conduct was not so steady as it should have been. He had made a Law to forbid all nocturnal Ceremonies; whereupon *Prætextatus*, the Proconsul of *Greece*, represented to him, that the depriving the *Greeks* of those Ceremonies, of which they were so fond, rendered their Lives quite uneasy. *Valentinian* was moved with this, and consented, that notwithstanding his Law, they might keep to the old Customs. It is true, that we have this Account from *Zosimus*, a *Pagan* Historian, and some may say, that he invented it, to induce a Belief that the *Pagans* were still in some Credit with the Emperors; but it may be answered, that

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that *Zosimus*, considering the then State of his Religion, was more likely to have been in a Humour of complaining of Mischief that was not done to it, than to please himself with the Thoughts of a Favour that was not shewn to it.

This is certain however, that there are Inscriptions at *Rome*, and in other Cities of *Italy*, by which it is manifest, that under the Reign of *Valentinian*, Persons of great Note celebrated the Sacrifices called *Taurobolia* and *Criobolia*, that is to say, *The sprinkling of Bulls Blood, or Rams Blood*. Nay, by the great Number of those Inscriptions, one would be apt to think, that this Ceremony was most in Fashion during the Time of this *Valentinian*, and the two other Emperors of the same Name.

As it is one of the oddest and most singular of all the *Heathen* Rites, I fancy, that a Description of it will not be unacceptable. *Prudentius*, who perhaps had seen it, gives it to us at length.

There was a deep Pit dug, into which the Person, for whom the Ceremony

remony was to be performed, descended with a sacred Bandage about his Head, a Crown upon it, and in fine, with an Equipage quite mysterious. Over the Pit was placed a Cover of Wood, pierced through with a great many Holes: To this Cover they brought a *Bull*, crowned with a Garland of Flowers, and little Plates of Gold hanging upon his Horns and Forehead. Then his Throat was cut with a consecrated Knife, and his Blood ran through the Holes that were in the Cover into the Pit, which the Person that stood there received with much Devotion, catching it on his Forehead, his Cheeks, his Arms, his Shoulders, and all the Parts of his Body, and took what Care he could that not one Drop should fall beside him. At last out he came, a frightful Spectacle, all dawbed with Blood; which still trickled down from his Hair, Beard, and Clothes; but his Comfort was, that now he was purify'd from all his Crimes and regenerated to all Eternity: For, it appears positively by the Inscriptions, this Sacrifice was to those who celebrated

brated it, a mystical and eternal Regeneration.

But unless it were renewed once in twenty Years, it would lose its Power of everlasting Duration. Women, as well as Men, received this Regeneration; they made all Partakers of it who desired it; and what is most remarkable of all, whole Cities received it by Deputation. This Sacrifice was now and then performed for the Emperors Health: And the Provinces made their Court to them, by sending some Person in their Name to besmear himself with the *Bull's Blood*, for the obtaining of a long and happy Life for the Emperors. All this is clear from the Inscriptions.

But now we come to the total Ruin of *Paganism* under *Theodosius* and his Sons.

Theodosius began first in *Egypt*, where he caused all the *Temples* to be shut up, and demolished that of *Serapis*, the most famous of them all.

As *Strabo* informs us, there was nothing finer in the whole *Pagan Religion* than the *Pilgrimages* which were made to *Serapis*. When the Time, says he, of certain Festivals was near at hand, such

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*a Multitude of People come down the Canal from Alexandria to Canopus, where this Temple stands, as is incredible. Day and Night there is nothing to be seen, but Boats full of Men and Women, singing and dancing with all the Freedom imaginable. At Canopus there is a vast Number of Inns on the Banks of the Canal, for the Refreshment of those Travellers, and for accommodating them in their Diversions. And therefore the Sophist Eunapius, who was a Pagan, seems to have had a mighty Concern for the Temple of Serapis, and with Gall enough he describes its unhappy End. Men (says he) that had never heard the Noise of War, were mighty valiant against the Stones of this Temple; but especially against the rich Offerings, which it was full of: And in those holy Places (says he) they put infamous and useless Monks, who, because they wore a black and slovenly Habit, arrogated to themselves a tyrannical Authority over the Minds of the People; and instead of those Gods which the Light of our natural Reasons discovers to us, they set up for Objects of our Adoration, the Heads
of*

of Malefactors executed for their Crimes, and pickled to preserve them from Corruption. Thus does this impious Wretch treat Monks and Relics; surely the Licentiousness of those Times was very great, when such Invectives were written against the Religion of the Emperors. *Ruffinus* informs us, that the Temple of *Serapis* was found to be full of secret Passages, and Machines contrived for the Impostures of the Priests. He tells us, amongst other Things, that on the East Side of the Temple, there was a little Window, through which, at a certain Time of the Day, a Ray of the Sun fell just upon the Mouth of *Serapis*: At the same time, an Image of the Sun made of Iron was brought in, which being attracted by a Loadstone fixed in the Ceiling, ascended up to the Image of *Serapis*. Then they cried out, that the Sun saluted their God: Nay, when the Iron Image fell back, and the Sun-Beam went off from *Serapis's* Mouth, they said, that the Sun had paid his due Compliment to him, and was retired about his own Affairs.

After

After *Theodosius* had defeated the Rebel *Eugenius*, he went to *Rome*, where the whole Senate still adhered to *Paganism*. Their chief Reason was, because, for twelve hundred Years, *Rome* had been on good Terms with its Gods, and received all kind of Favours from them. The Emperor made a Speech to the Senate, exhorting them to embrace the *Christian* Religion; but they replied, that by Custom and Experience, they had found *Paganism* to be a good Religion: And if they should change it for that of the *Christians*, they knew not what might be the Event. This was then the *Theology* of the *Roman Senate*. When *Theodosius* saw them so stiff; he told them, that the public Treasury was too much incumbered with the Expences necessary for the Sacrifices, and that he wanted the Money to pay his Armies. They replied, that their Sacrifices would not be valid, unless they were made at the Charge of the Public. But that Inconvenience was no Argument with him: Consequently the Sacrifices and old Ceremonies ceased. And *Zosimus* does not fail to observe,

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serve, that from that time forwards Misfortunes of all sorts happened to the *Roman Empire*.

The same Author tells us, that when *Theodosius* made that Voyage to *Rome*, *Serena*, the Wife of *Stilicon*, entered into the Temple of the Mother of the Gods, to insult her, and that she made bold to convert a fine Neck-lace, which the Goddess wore, to her own Use: An old *Vestal* Virgin reproved her very sharply for this Impiety, and followed her out of the Temple, with a thousand Curses. After which, says *Zosimus*, poor *Serena* was often frightened (both sleeping and waking) with a certain Vision, that threatned her with Death.

The last Efforts of *Paganism* were those made by *Symmachus*, to obtain of the Emperors *Valentinian*, *Theodosius*, and *Arcadius*, the Re-establishment of the Privileges of the *Vestals*, and of the Altar of *Victory* in the Capitol; but every body knows with what Vigour St. *Ambrose* opposed it. Yet it appears by the very Process of that Dispute, that *Rome* still retained a very strong
Tincture

Tincture of Paganism. For St. Ambrose asks Symmachus, why the Pagans are not contented with having the public Squares, Porticoes and Baths filled with their Idols, and if nothing will serve them unless their Altar of Victory be set up in the Capitol, the very Place of the whole City to which most Christians resort; that the Christians, who in that case (says he) must, whether they will or no, have the Smoak of the Sacrifices blown in their Eyes, the Noise of the Music in their Ears, the Asbes in their Throats, and the Incense in their Noses.

Nay, even when Rome was besieged by Alaric, in the Reign of Honorius, it was still full of Idols. Zosimus complains, that all things conspiring then to the Ruin of that unhappy City, the Gods were not only disrobed, but even some of those that were of Gold or Silver melted down; of which Number was *Valor* or *Fortitude*, which from that time forward wholly abandoned the Romans. This pretty Conceit, Zosimus did not doubt, would pass for the true Cause of the taking of Rome.

I am in some Suspence, whether, upon the Credit of this Author, we may admit the following Story to be true. *Honorius* forbid all Persons that were not of the *Christian* Religion, to appear at Court with a Shoulder-belt, or to have any military Command. *Generidus*, a *Pagan*, and a *Barbarian* too, but a Man of great Courage, who commanded the Troops that lay in *Dalmatia* and *Pannonia*, came no more into the Emperor's Presence, threw off his Shoulder-belt, and did Duty no longer. *Honorius* asked him one Day, why he came not to Court in his Turn, as it was his Duty? He replied, That there was a Law made, that deprived him both of his Belt and his Command. The Emperor told him, that Law was not for such Men as he was; but *Generidus* answered, that he could not admit of any Distinction that separated him from all those who professed the same Worship with himself. In short, he would not act again, till the Emperor himself, compelled by Necessity, repealed his Law. If this Story be true, then we may judge, that

that *Honorius* contributed very little to the Ruin of the *Pagan* Religion.

But at last, all Exercise of the *Pagan* Religion was prohibited, on Pain of Death, by a Constitution of the Emperors *Valentinian* the Third, and *Martian*, *An. Christ.* 451. and this was the last Blow given to that false Religion. And yet we find, that those very Emperors, who were so zealous for the Advancement of Christianity, did, for all that, retain some Relics of *Paganism*, and such too as were not inconsiderable. As for Example, they still took upon them the Title of Sovereign *Pontiffs*; which was as much as to say Sovereign *Pontiffs* of the *Angurs*, the Soothsayers, in short, of all the Colleges of *Pagan* Priests, and the Heads of all the ancient *Romish* Idolatry.

Zosimus pretends, that even *Constantine* the Great, *Valentinian*, and *Valens*, willingly accepted from the *Pagan* Priests both the Title and Habit of that Dignity, which, according to Custom, was presented to them at their Accession to the Empire; but that *Gratian* refused the Pontifical Equipage; which being related

lated to the Priests, the principal amongst them replied in a great Heat; *Si princeps non vult appellari Pontifex, admodum brevis Pontifex Maximus fiet.* The Point of this Saying lies wholly in the Latin Words, and it was grounded on the then Revolt of *Maximus* against *Gratian*, with a Design to strip him of the Empire.

But the Inscriptions still remaining, are a more unexceptionable Testimony of this Matter, than that of *Zosimus*. There we see the Title of *Pontifex Maximus*, or Sovereign Pontiff, given to the *Christian* Emperors; and even in the sixth Century, two hundred Years after *Christianity* had ascended the Imperial Throne. The * Emperor *Justin*, amongst his other Titles, assumes that of *Pontifex Maximus*, in an Inscription which he had caused to be made for the City of *Justinipolis* in *Isirio*, to which he gave his Name.

To be one of the Gods of a false Religion is surely much worse than to be the *Pontifex Maximus* of it. Now the

* *Gratarius*.

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Heathens deified the Roman Emperors: And why not? They had made the City of Rome a Goddess. The Emperors *Theodosius* and *Arcadius*, though they were *Christians*, permitted *Symmachus*, that great Champion for the *Pagan* Religion, to give them the Title of (*Vestra Divinitas*, or) *Your Divinity*: Which he could only express in the Sense, and according to the Custom of the *Pagans*. And in some Inscriptions, in Honour of *Arcadius* and *Honorius*, are these Words, *Devotus Numini, Majestatiq; eorum*, i. e. *Devoted to their Divinity, and Majesty*.

Nay, the *Christian* Emperors not only received those Titles from others, but gave them to themselves: As appears by the Constitutions (or Laws) of *Theodosius*, *Valentinian*, *Honorius*, and *Anastasius*; wherein they sometimes call their Edicts, *Heavenly Statutes*, and *Divine Oracles*: And sometimes they say expressly, *The most happy Decree of our Divinity*, &c.

It may be said, that this was nothing but the then Stile of the Court of

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Chancery, but it was certainly a bad Stile, ridiculous under the *Heathen Religion* itself, and blasphemous under the *Christian*. And therefore is it not very wonderful, that such extravagant Rant should become so familiar and common in Speech, that they could not forbear it!

The Truth is, that Flattery, which Subjects are so apt to bestow upon their Sovereigns, and the natural Fondness which Princes have for it raise, kept up the Use of these Expressions too long. I confess that this Flattery, and this Fondness, are each of them very extraordinary in its kind: And they are both unlimited. That a Man should be in earnest when he gives another Man the Title of a God, is hard to conceive; but that this Man should accept the Title, and that with so much Fondness as to accustom him to the giving of it to himself, and all this while have a right Notion of what a God is; this, is a Thing that I know not how it can be reconciled with a Salve to the Honour of the Human Nature.

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There was nothing so tempting in the Title of *Pontifex Maximus*, that could puff the Vanity of the Christian Emperors to keep it up: But perhaps they thought that it would tend to prolong their Respect from the *Pagans* that remained. Or, it may be, they pleased themselves with the Thought of being the Heads of the *Christian Religion*, under the Ambiguity of that Title; for upon certain Occasions they were magisterial enough in their Use of it: And some Authors say, that the Emperors renounced this Stile, out of Respect to the Popes, who, probably, were apprehensive that they might make an ill Use of it.

But it is not so surprizing to see these Relics of *Paganism* transplanted for some Time into the *Christian Religion*, as to find what was most barbarous, extravagant, and the most opposite to the Common-Sense and Interest of Mankind, to be the last that left the Field of all the *Pagan Superstitions*; I mean, Human Sacrifices. It was a strange whimsical Religion; for it consisted of some Things extreme-

ly frolicksom, and others very tragical. In one Place, the Ladies went to the Temples in a Fit of Devotion, to offer their Favors to the first Comer: And in another Place, the same Devotion caused the Throats of Men to be cut upon an Altar. These detestable Sacrifices were made in all Nations: The *Grecians* performed them, as well as the *Scythians*, though not so often; and the *Romans*, though they had obliged the *Cartaginians*, in a Treaty of Peace concluded between them, to sacrifice their Children no longer to *Saturn*, according to the Custom derived from their Ancestors, the *Phenicians*, yet the *Romans* themselves every Year sacrificed a Man to *Jupiter Latialis*. *Eusebius* quotes *Porphyrus* for this, as a thing still practised in his Days. *Lactantius* and *Prudentius*, the one in the beginning, and the other at the end of the fourth Age, are Evidences of the same Thing, each of them for his own Time. These Ceremonies, that were so full of Horror, lasted as long as the *Oracles*, which discovered nothing but Folly and Credulity.

C H A P.

CHAP. V.

That if Paganism had not been abolished, yet the Oracles would have ceased. The first particular Reason of their Decay.

THE Oracles could not but be involv'd in the Ruin of *Paganism*, when it was abolished by *Christianity*. It is moreover certain that *Christianity*, even before it was the prevailing Religion; did great Mischief to the Oracles; for the *Christians* made it their Study to disabuse Mankind, by a Discovery of their Impostures. But independently of the *Christian* Religion, the Oracles for other Reasons declined, and at last must have quite failed.

It was observed that they began to degenerate from the very Time when they left off giving their Answers in Verse. *Plutarch* has written a Tract expressly to inquire into the Reason of

this Change, wherein, according to the Manner of the *Greek* Authors, he sets down all that could be said on this Subject, either true or false.

First he says, that the God who inspires the *Pythian* Priestess adapts himself to her Capacity, and does not answer in Verse by her, as she has not a natural Genius for Poetry. The Knowledge of Futurity belongs to *Apollo*; but the Manner of expressing it to the Priestess. It is not the Fault of the Musician, if he cannot play as well upon a Harp as upon a Flute, when he is obliged to accommodate himself to the Instrument. If the *Pythian* Oracle delivered its Answers in Writing, should we deny that *Apollo* inspired them, because they were not written in a very fine Hand? The Soul of the *Pythian*, when uniting to *Apollo*, is like a young Virgin going to be married, who as yet knows nothing, and has not the Art of Versification.

But why then did all the antient *Pythian* Priestesses answer in Verse? Were they not Virgin Souls united

to

to *Apollo*? To this *Plutarch* replies: First that those Priestesses did now and then speak in Prose; but that in the ancient Times all People were born Poets: So that as he tells us, they had no sooner drank a little freely, but they fell a rhyming; they had no sooner cast their Eyes on a pretty Woman, but they made Verses without end; and they uttered Sounds, which were naturally Songs. Consequently, their Feasts and their Courtships were the most delightful things in the World. But now this Poetic Genius has deserted Mankind: And though our Amours are as ardent as those of our Ancestors, and though we are as free in Expression, yet Love creeps in humble Prose. And even all the Sect of *Socrates*, and the *Platonists*, who talked so much of Love, knew not how to make Verses. The whole of this has too much Fancy, and too little Truth in it, to deserve a serious Answer.

Plutarch gives another Reason, which has something more of Probability, viz. that the Ancients wrote al-

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ways in Verse, whether they treated of Religion, Morality, Natural Philosophy, or Astronomy. Orpheus, and Hesiod, who were well known to be Poets, were Philosophers also: And Parmenides, Xenophanes, Empedocles, Eudoxus, and Thales, whom all Men own for Philosophers, were also Poets. It is very strange indeed that Poetry should be elder Brother to Prose, and that Men did not at first write in the most natural Language! But it is highly probable, that since all their Writings then were Precepts, they were formed into Metre, that they might be the more easily remembered: And therefore all their Laws and their moral Maxims were in Verse. Taking this for granted, Poetry had a much more serious Original than is usually imagined, and the Muses are quite deviated from their original Gravity. Who would imagine that the Code should naturally have been written in Metre, and *Fontaine's Tales* in Prose? There was a Necessity therefore, says *Plutarch*, that the ancient Oracles should be delivered in Verses, since all Mat-

ters

ters of Importance were so: *Apollo* too was in this willing to follow the Mode of those Times; and when Prose came to be in Use, he was for being still in the Fashion.

I am of Opinion myself, that the *Oracles* at first gave Answers in Verse, both that they might be more easily remembered, and to comply with the Custom which had condemned Prose to be used only in common Discourse. But History and Philosophy began to shake off those useless Chains towards the Reign of *Cyrus*. For *Thales*, who lived at that Time, was one of the last Poetic Philosophers; and *Apollo* only left off speaking in Verse a little before *Pyrrhus's* Days, as *Cicero* informs us, which was about two hundred and thirty Years after *Cyrus*. It appears from hence that Poetry being found suitable to the Dignity of the *Oracles*, it was retained in Use at *Delphos*, as long as it was possible; till at last they were reduced to humble Prose.

Plutarch could hardly be in earnest, when he said, that the *Oracles* were pronounced in Prose, because People required

clearer Answers, and would be no longer deluded with the mysterious Bombast of Verses. For whether it were the Gods, or only the Priests that spoke, I would fain know if it was possible to oblige either to speak more clearly.

But he has more Probability on his Side, when he pretends, that prophetic Versification fell into Contempt, by being in Use amongst those pretended Fortune-tellers, who strolled about the Country, and were often consulted by the Rabble in the Cross-ways. Now the Priests of the Temples scorned to use any Custom in common with them; for they were Quacks of more Dignity and Importance; which, in that Profession makes a mighty Difference.

But *Plutarch* reserves his true Reason till last: Which is, that in former Times Men went to *Delphos* to consult only about Matters of the highest Consequence; as *Wars*, Building of Cities, the Interests of Kings, and Commonwealths; whereas now-a-days, says he, private Persons go thither to ask the Oracle, If they shall marry? If they shall buy a Slave? If they shall thrive

thrive by their Traffic? And when Cities send thither, it is only to inquire, whether their Lands shall be fruitful, or their Flocks increase? These Questions deserve not the Trouble of an Answer in Verse; and if the God should take that Pains, he would be like those Sophists, who make a Parade of their Learning, when there is no Need for it.

But now I come to that which conducted most of all to the Ruin of the *Oracles*. The *Romans* were become Masters of all *Greece*, and of those Kingdoms founded by *Alexander's* Successors. And as soon as the *Greeks* had submitted to the *Roman* Yoke, from which they had no Hopes of being ever free, *Greece* was no longer agitated with the continual Divisions which had harried all those petty States, whose Interests were so mightily embroiled; for their common Masters made them all quiet, and Peace was the Product of their Slavery. I think, the *Greeks* had never happy Days till then; for they lived in a profound Tranquillity, and in perfect Ease; they passed their Time in their Parks of Exercise, in

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their Theatres, and in their Schools of Philosophy. They had public Sports, Comedies, Disputations, and Arrangues; and for Men of their Genius, what could be desired more? But all this afforded little Business for the Oracles, and there was very seldom any Necessity to importune the *Delphian* God. Therefore it was very natural for the Priests not to give themselves the Trouble any longer of answering in Verse, when they found their Trade not so gainful as it had been formerly.

As the *Romans* did the Oracles great Prejudice by the Peace which they established in *Greece*, so they did them much more by the Slight they put upon them; for their Taste did not lie that way; they were attached only to the Books of the *Sybil*s, and to the *Tuscan Devinations*, which were performed by the Observations of the Flights, Singing, or Feeding of Birds. Now as the Maxims and Opinions of the Governors, easily pass to the Governed, it is, no Wonder, that the Oracles, being a *Greek* Invention, should follow the Fate of *Greece*; and that as
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with her they flourished, so with her they decay'd.

But for all this, we must acknowledge, that there were Oracles in Italy. *Tiberius*, as *Suetonius* says, went to the Oracle of *Geryon*, at *Aponus*, now *Athens*, near *Padua*: where was a certain Spring, which if we will believe *Claudian*, restored Speech to the Dumb, and healed all Sorts of Diseases. *Suetonius* says farther, that *Tiberius* had once a Mind to destroy the Oracles that were near *Rome*, but was diverted from it by the Miracle of the *Prænestine* Lots, which, when they were brought from *Prænest* to *Rome*, in a Box well locked and sealed, were not to be found in it; but when the same Box was carried back to *Prænest*, there they were.

To these Lots of *Prænest*, and to those of *Antium*, we must add the Lots of the * Temple of *Hercules* which was at *Tibur*.

Pliny the Younger thus describes the Oracle of *Clitumnus*, the God of a certain River in *Umbria*: The Temple is ancient, and much revered: In it stands

* *Statius*,

Clitumnus,

Clitumnus, in a Roman Habit, and the
 Lots manifest the Presence, and Power of
 the Divinity. Round about him are se-
 veral little Chapels, in some of which
 there are Fountains and Springs: for Cli-
 tumnus is, as it were, the Father of
 many other Rrivers, which join him. There
 is a Bridge which separates the sacred
 Part of his Waters from the profane.
 Above this Bridge, People are allowed only
 to pass in Boats; but below it, they may
 bathe themselves. I do not know of any
 other Rivers that pronounced Oracles,
 for it was not their Custom.

Nay, at Rome itself there were Oracles.
 Had not *Æsculapius* one in his Temple,
 which stood in an Island of the River
Tiber? There has been found at Rome
 a Piece of a Marble Table, wherein
 the Stories of the three Miracles of *Æs-*
culapius are engraven in Greek. The
 most considerable of them is this that
 follows, translated *verbatim* from the
 Inscription. At the same Time, the Ora-
 cle made this Answer to a blind Man
 named Caius: He was advised to go to
 the sacred Altar, there to kneel down
 and

and worship; then to go from the Right Side to the Left, and lay his five Fingers upon the Altar, and afterwards clap his Hand upon his Eyes. When all this was done, the blind Man was restored to his Sight, of which the People were Witnesses, and testified the Joy which they received in seeing such great Miracles wrought in the Reign of our Emperor Antoninus.

The two other Cures are not so surprising; for one was only of a *Pleurisy*, and the other of a *Bloody Flux*; both of them desperate Diseases indeed; but the God prescribed to his Patients *Pine-Apples and Honey, with Wine and certain Ashes*; which are Things that those Men who are hard of Belief, will be apt to think are not sure Remedies.

These Inscriptions, for all that they are in *Greek*, were certainly formed at *Rome*; for the Shape of the Letters, and the Orthography, do not at all seem to be by the Hand of a *Grecian Sculptor*. Besides, tho' it be true, that the *Romans* made their Inscriptions generally in *Latin*, yet they formed some in *Greek*, especially when they had a particular

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particular Reason for it. Now it is very probable, that no other Language but the *Greek* was used in the Temple of *Æsculapius*, because he was a *Grecian* God, and sent for to *Rome* from *Greece*, in that great Plague, of which every one knows the History.

Thus we see that this Oracle of *Æsculapius* was not of *Roman* Institution; and I believe, that if it were an Inquiry worth the while, most of the *Italian Oracles* would be found to be of *Greek* Original.

Be this at it will, the Smallness of the Number of the *Oracles* in *Italy*, and even at *Rome* itself, is but a very inconsiderable Exception to what we have advanced. *Æsculapius* dealt only in *Phyfic*, and had no Share in the Government: And tho' he had a rare Knack at making the Blind to see, yet the Senate would not have trusted him with the least *Affair of State*. Private Persons amongst the *Romans* might give what Credit they would to the *Oracles*; but the State had no Faith at all in them. The *Sibyls*, and the Entrails of Animals

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imals were its Guides: And a vast Number of Gods fell into Contempt, when the People took notice, that the Masters of the World did not vouchsafe to consult them.



CHAP.

C H A P. VI.

The second particular Cause of the Decay of the Oracles.

I Meet with a Difficulty here, that I will not conceal. About the Time of *Pyrrhus*, *Apollo* was reduced to *Prose*, that is to say, the *Oracles* began then to grow into *Discredit*, and yet the *Romans* were not *Masters of Greece* till a long Time after *Pyrrhus*; and from the Reign of *Pyrrhus* to the Establishment of the Empire of the *Romans* in *Greece*, there were as many Wars and Commotions in that Country as ever, and by Consequence as many important Reasons for consulting the Oracle of *Delphos*.

This indeed is true; but we must also observe that about the Time of *Alexander* the Great, and a little before *Pyrrhus*'s Days, certain great Sects of *Philosophers* were formed in *Greece*, viz. *Cynics*, *Peripatetics*, and *Epicureans*, who

who made a Jest of the *Oracles*. The *Epicureans* especially made themselves merry with the paltry Poetry that came from *Delphos*, where the Priests blundered out Verses as well as they could, and often committed Faults against the Rules of Metre. Now those satyrical *Philosophers* were mightily disturbed, that *Apollo*, the God of Poetry, should fall infinitely short of *Homer*, who was but a meer Mortal, whom *Apollo* himself had inspired.

It was to little Purpose to tell them, that the Badness of the Verses was an Indication that they were made by a God, who had a noble Contempt of Rules, or the *Beauty of Style*. For this would not pass with the *Philosophers*, who, to ridicule this Answer, compared it to the Story of a Painter, who being engaged to draw the Picture of a Horse, rolling on his Back on the Ground, drew one running full Speed: And when he was told, that this was not such a Picture as was bespoke, he turned it upside down, and then asked, *If the Horse did not now tumble upon his Back?* Thus did these *Philosophers* banter such Persons,

who by a Way of Reasoning that destroyed itself, inferred, that the Verses were made by a God, whether they were good or bad.

At length, the Priests of *Delphos* being quite run down by the Banter of all those Wits, were forced to renounce Verses, at least as to what was pronounced on the *Tripod*; for there were other Poets in the Temple, who deliberately turned into Verse, what the Divine Fury had inspired the *Pythian* Priestesses with only in Prose. Was it not ridiculous, that Men could not be contented with the Oracle just as it came from the Mouth of the God? But perhaps, such as had come a great Way for it, were ashamed to carry home an Oracle in meer Prose.

The Gods being willing to keep up the Use of Verses as long as ever they could, did now and then condescend to steal some out of *Homer*; whose Poetry was certainly better than their own. Of this there are Examples enough; but, both the stolen Verses, and the Poets kept in pay in their Temples, must be admitted as Proofs that the old natural

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natural Poetry of the Oracles was in very great Disgrace.

Those great Sects of Philosophers, Enemies to the Oracles, must needs have done them a more essential Prejudice than the reducing them to Prose. For no doubt they opened the Eyes of many rational Persons, and made the Populace suspect the Certainty of what they did not doubt before. It was happy for the Oracles that Philosophy did not appear in their Infancy.



C H A P. VII.

The last particular Causes of the Decay of the Oracles.

THE Cheats of the *Oracles* were so gross, that at last they were discovered by a thousand different Accidents. I suppose that the *Oracles* were at first entertained with great Fondness and Joy, because nothing could be more convenient than to have *Gods* always ready at Hand to answer every Question that might be suggested by Uneasiness, or Curiosity: And I fancy that it was not without great Reluctance, that People parted with this Conveniency; and that the *Oracles* could never have come to an End with Paganism, if they had not been the most impertinent Things in the World. But, at last, People, after so much experimental Know-

Knowledge, could not help being undeceived.

The Priests contributed to it not a little, by their most impudent Abuse of their false Ministry; for they thought they had brought Matters to such a Point, that there was no Need for them to use any Decorum.

I say nothing of the humorous Answers sometimes delivered by these Oracles. For Example, * To a Man that came to ask of the Deiry, *What he should do to be rich?* He was answered, very pleasantly, *That he need do no more than get all the Land between Sicyone and Corinth.* And sometimes the Consulters would make free with the Oracles. Polemon, sleeping in the Temple of Esculapius, to learn of him how he should be cured of the Gout, the God appeared to him, and told him, *That he must abstain from cold Drink.* Polemon replied, *What would you advise, my good Friends, if you were to cure an Ox?* But these were only the merry Conceits of the Priest, who would sometimes both give and take a Joke.

Albinus. People who consult the Oracle

It was still more remarkable, that the Gods were sure to be enamoured with the fair Ladies, for they were to stay whole Nights in their Temples, dressed for the Purpose by their own Husbands, and furnished with Presents, to requite the God for his Pains. It is true, that the Doors of the Temple were shut up in the Sight of the Spectators, but the Husbands were not let into the Secret of the subterraneous Passages.

For my Part, I do not question but such Intrigues were practised more than once. *Herodotus* writes, that in the eighth and uppermost Story of that superb Tower belonging to the Temple of *Belus* in *Babylon*, there was a magnificent Bed, where a Woman, singled out by the God, lay every Night. The like was done at *Thebes* in *Egypt*: And when the Priestess of the Oracle of *Patara* in *Lycia* was to prophesy, she must first take a Night's Lodging in the Temple, whither *Apollo* came to inspire her.

All these Things were practised during the darkest State of *Paganism*, and in Times when the *Pagan Ceremonies* were

were not liable to be contradicted; but in the View of the very Christians themselves, *Saturn* of *Alexandria* had such Women brought in the Night to his Temple, as he thought fit to name by the Mouth of his Priest *Tyrannus*. Many Women had received this Honour with great Respect, and none made any Complaints of *Saturn*, tho' he was the oldest, and the most uncomplaisant of all the Gods. But at last there was one, who, having lain in the Temple, considered with herself, that nothing had passed there, but what declared the Performance to be quite HUMAN, and what *Tyrannus* was very capable of: Whereupon she acquainted her Husband of the Thing, who commencing a Suit against *Tyrannus*, the Wretch confessed all: What a Scandal was this to *Alexandria*!

Thus the Wickedness of the Priests, their Insolence, the several Accidents that had brought their Cheats to Light, the Obscurity, Uncertainty, and the Falseness of their Answers, would at last have destroyed the Reputation of the Oracles, and proved their utter Ruin,

And now we have seen the End of the

even if *Paganism* had not been come to a Period. But other foreign Reasons are added to it; such as first, the Jestings made of the Oracles by the great Sects of the *Grecian* Philosophers; then the total Neglect of them by the *Romans*; and last of all, the utter Detestation of them by the *Christians*, who abolished them together with *Paganism*.

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